Life After Hobbes?
The Logic of Power from Hobbes to Foucault

by

Michael Reid

A thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
Graduate Department of Political Science
University of Toronto

© Copyright by Michael Reid, 2001
The author has granted a non-exclusive licence allowing the National Library of Canada to reproduce, loan, distribute or sell copies of this thesis in microform, paper or electronic formats.

The author retains ownership of the copyright in this thesis. Neither the thesis nor substantial extracts from it may be printed or otherwise reproduced without the author’s permission.

L’auteur a accordé une licence non exclusive permettant à la Bibliothèque nationale du Canada de reproduire, prêter, distribuer ou vendre des copies de cette thèse sous la forme de microfiche/film, de reproduction sur papier ou sur format électronique.

L’auteur conserve la propriété du droit d’auteur qui protège cette thèse. Ni la thèse ni des extraits substantiels de celle-ci ne doivent être imprimés ou autrement reproduits sans son autorisation.
How and why did life—that is, biological existence—become not only the central category of modern politics but also the central object of modern power? Hobbes was the first to design a political system joining life with politics. Hobbes argued that the preservation of life was the goal of government and that human physiology was the source of all human behaviour. These two arguments placed life at the centre of modern politics: the authority of government was linked to its ability to protect life; governments became concerned with physiology to understand the causes of, and the ways of influencing, human behaviour. Subsequent political philosophers, such as Bentham, radicalized Hobbes's arguments. Bentham claimed the study of physiology highlighted not only the causes of human behaviour but also how this behaviour could be manipulated and transformed. Bentham's Panopticon was a technology that could, by using the physiological “springs and actions” of human behaviour, disassemble and reassemble the individual. Individuals who represent a threat to the happiness of society as a whole should, Bentham insisted, be subjected to the Panopticon, which would transform them into productive members of society. This technological ability to manipulate life, Foucault later argued, created a “strange logic” at the heart of modern power. The possibility of transforming the dynamics of life produced a continuum from the “normal” to the “pathological”; and individuals were related to political power depending on where they fell within this continuum. The normal individual was held up as the model, and the pathological individual was subjected to treatments that aimed to transform him into a normal individual. If the pathological individual resisted, he was to be destroyed. The destruction of the pathological individual reveals the strange logic of modern power: in the name of life (the normal), governments have the right and the duty to destroy life (the pathological). While Foucault failed to develop a persuasive alternative to this strange logic, he outlined how it has become the most significant problem facing contemporary political philosophy.
Dedication

To my supervisor Professor Alkis Kontos, my remarkable teacher and mentor. He offered me the idea that became my thesis and then consistently demonstrated that thought is a noble pursuit.

To my wife Andréa, my friend and partner at every step. She guided me out of the low points and helped make this thesis much more that I could have accomplished on my own.
Table of Contents

Abstract ii

Dedication iii

Abbreviations v

Introduction 1

   Introduction 19
   Chapter 1: The Impotence of Objectivity 23
   Chapter 2: Authorizing Power 51
   Conclusion 81

Part 2: Bentham: Politicizing Life
   Transition A: The Politics of Crime and Punishment 86
   Chapter 3: The Delicate Art of Pleasure and Pain 102
   Chapter 4: Education within the Panopticon 118
   Chapter 5: The Pursuit of Efficiency 134
   Transition B: Regulating the Individual 145

Part 3: Foucault: Understanding the Norm
   Introduction 154
   Chapter 6: The Technologies of Power 160
   Chapter 7: Subject as Object 180
   Transition C: The Status of the Subject 196
   Chapter 8: The Ethic of Care 204
   Conclusion 228

Conclusion 238

Bibliography 250
### Abbreviations

#### Thomas Hobbes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Title</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Beh</td>
<td>Behemoth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Civ</td>
<td>De Cive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cor</td>
<td>De Corpore</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DM</td>
<td>Thomas White's De Mundo Examined</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EL</td>
<td>The Elements of Law</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hom</td>
<td>De Homine (all translations are my own)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lev</td>
<td>Leviathan</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Jeremy Bentham

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Title</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>IPML</td>
<td>Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pan</td>
<td>Panopticon, or. The Inspection-House. &amp;c.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PP</td>
<td>Panopticon Postscripts (2 volumes)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TSA</td>
<td>A Table of the Springs of Action</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>W</td>
<td>The Works of Jeremy Bentham (14 volumes)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Michel Foucault

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Title</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>Les anormaux (all translations are my own)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BC</td>
<td>Birth of the Clinic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DE</td>
<td>Dits et écrits (4 volumes) (all translations are my own)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DP</td>
<td>Discipline and Punish</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DS</td>
<td>Il faut défendre la société (all translations are my own)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E</td>
<td>Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FL</td>
<td>Foucault Live</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G</td>
<td>“Governmentality” in The Foucault Effect</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HS</td>
<td>History of Sexuality (3 volumes)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PK</td>
<td>Power/Knowledge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SP</td>
<td>“Subject and Power” in Michel Foucault. Beyond Structuralism and Herminutics.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
But what might be called a society's "threshold of modernity" has been reached when the life of the species is wagered on its own political strategies. For millennia, man remained what he was for Aristotle: a living being with the additional capacity for a political existence; modern man is an animal whose politics places his existence as a living being in question.

Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Vol. I.*

**Introduction**

**HOBBS'S REVOLUTION**

Hobbes claimed that before him political philosophy had been built on "shifting sand". Hobbes's self-appointed task was to turn thought about politics into a science for the first time. To do so, Hobbes constructed a three-part *Encyclopaedia of the Philosophical Sciences*, which opened with an investigation of the fundamental laws of motion. An understanding of the law and catalysts of motion was, Hobbes explained, the true beginning of political knowledge; the science of politics was a branch of the more general science of bodies and their motion. In particular, Hobbes argued that the science of politics was the science of the motion of the human body. Without this science, Hobbes thought that we would not be able to truly answer such questions as: Why do we behave as we do? and, How can we control our behaviour? Only a rigorous and honest science of motion could unlock the true motivations of human behaviour—Hobbes's *Encyclopaedia* was his attempt to build such a science. Hobbes's Encyclopaedia began by outlining the most general laws of motion in *De Corpore* and then highlighting the particular qualities of human motion in *De Homine*. His
investigation of the qualities of human motion led, in *De Cive*, to Hobbes’s consideration of politics. In *De Cive* Hobbes used his analysis of human motion to articulate a vision of what politics must be if humans are to live peacefully. To achieve peace we must clearly understand the dynamics of human motion and the methods by which these dynamics can be contained. And because Hobbes’s vision of politics was the first based on a rigorous science of motion, he exclaimed that political science was, “no older ... than my own book *De Cive*” (*Cor*, Epistle Dedicatory, p. ix). Hobbes’s political science was the first to use the science of motion to strip away all our pretensions about our own motivations and to force us to come face to face with the fact that we are all, at the core, passionate and self-interested animals.

Hobbes’s conclusions about human motion caused him to put forward a new description of the dynamics of politics. Life, Hobbes explained, was (i) the foundation and (ii) the goal of all government. As a result, Hobbes used the term “life” in two different ways. As the foundation of government, Hobbes understood life in terms of the body’s physiology. The physiology of the body, Hobbes argued, determined human behaviour. For this reason, Hobbes claimed that his science of politics was as indebted to William Harvey’s discoveries in physiology as it was to Galileo’s discoveries about motion. A study of physiology, Hobbes claimed, demonstrated that all human motion was, by necessity, either motion toward pleasure or motion away from pain. The attempt to pursue pleasure and avoid pain often becomes so single-minded that individuals view others as little more than instruments to be used. Humans find different things pleasurable and painful, and this generates hostility and conflict about the things that governments should encourage and prohibit. In short, the pursuit of pleasure and the avoidance of pain tends to make human relations contentious rather than cooperative. That human behaviour was structured by an appetite for pleasure and an aversion to pain was, Hobbes concluded, at the root of the most fundamental political problem—the problem of war in general and civil war in particular. According to Hobbes, the task of politics was to overcome the contentiousness born of human physiology to enable humans to live together peacefully. Now, to bring about peaceful relations, Hobbes did not
encourage governments to direct their subjects' attention away from pleasure and pain toward, for example, images of virtue. Such an attempt would be futile. Instead, Hobbes argued that the same motion that caused political problems—the pursuit of pleasure and avoidance of pain—could be used to find a solution to these problems. For Hobbes, a properly instituted and structured government was a government that harnessed the motion toward pleasure and away from pain to the pursuit of peace by connecting this motion to the maintenance of a strong, orderly and prosperous state. Hobbes's science of politics was his attempt to highlight the dynamics of human physiology, and devise a form of government capable of controlling these dynamics.

As the goal of government, Hobbes understood life in terms of biological existence. Human motion, Hobbes explained, was not simply structured by the pursuit of pleasure and avoidance of pain. It was also structured by a desire for self-preservation. Hobbes saw the pursuit of pleasure and avoidance of pain and the desire for self-preservation as intimately linked; life itself (i.e., biological existence) is the necessary condition for the pursuit of pleasure. Because the pursuit of pleasure and avoidance of pain make human relations contentious, if individuals were to feel secure about their ability to preserve themselves, some form of government was necessary. In the absence of government, humans would find themselves in the middle of a vicious war of all against all. Only government is capable of transforming the contentiousness that arises out of human motion into cooperation. But Hobbes was not interested in arguing for the necessity of government in general. Hobbes wanted to demonstrate that, given the dynamics of human motion, only a particular type of government would be capable of regulating human motion such that the individual felt secure about self-preservation; only a particular type of government would be capable of establishing peaceful relations among subjects and between subjects and the sovereign. Hobbes's best possible sovereign—the Leviathan—would be capable of producing peace because the subjects would understand that the Leviathan was the necessary condition of their self-preservation, and because the Leviathan not only understood the fundamental principles
Introduction

of human motion, but also grasped that the self-preservation of the individual was the first order of politics. The Leviathan was Hobbes's version of a sovereign whose governing of individuals was based on a scientific understanding of the dynamics of human motion, and who used this understanding to construct a body politic in which individuals would be able to engage in the pursuit of pleasure without colliding with one another.

In turning to life as the foundation and the goal of government Hobbes revolutionized the meaning of politics. No longer did political thought need to be oriented by metaphysics or the divine. No longer did political thought depend on the discovery of the "true" meaning of justice or the good. And no longer would "mere life" be banished to the periphery of politics. Instead, political thought needed to begin with an attempt to develop a comprehensive and persuasive account of the basic physiological dynamics of life. This account of the basic dynamics of life would, in turn, be used to develop a system of government able to contain and harness these dynamics. In articulating this political vision, Hobbes wanted to transform the meaning of political action. No longer did political action concern the acquisition of glory. No longer did political action equate to a pursuit of virtue. And no longer would the proper ordering of the soul be the fundamental political concern. Instead, the first order of government was the self-preservation of the individual. As Hobbes presented it, the art of government was the art of harnessing the dynamics of life to build a body politic that had as its primary goal the preservation of the life of the individual. Hobbes did not, however, see self-preservation as an end in itself. Once the self-preservation of the individual was secure, the energy of human motion would no longer be wasted in hostility and war but would instead be directed toward what Hobbes called "commodious living". Although the primary goal of a properly constituted government would be the self-preservation of the individual, this protection of the individual was intended to allow individuals to direct their energies toward industry and the building of a world full of the comforts and commodities that can be produced within a peaceful civil society.
IN HOBBES’S WAKE

In retrospect, Hobbes’s revolution was more dramatic than even he imagined. By invoking life, Hobbes provided the foundation upon which something unprecedented began. “The Greeks,” Giorgio Agamben wrote, “had no single term to express what we mean by ‘life.’ They used two terms ... zoe, which expressed the simple fact of living common to all living beings (animals, men, or gods), and bios, which indicated the form of way of living proper to an individual or a group.”1 The Greeks, Agamben argued, established a strict separation between zoe and bios. Zoe—the simple fact of living—while worthy of scientific study, was not a fully political category. Politics was instead concerned with bios and the “good life”. Politics was seen as an attempt to understand and achieve the good life, which was the way of life “most proper” to human beings. But though the Greeks gave political priority to the idea of the good life, they devoted some attention to the connection between mere life and the good life. First, it was argued that before the good life could be attained the necessities of life must be satisfied. Aristotle, for example, focused on “household management” as the way to provide for the necessities of life. A well-ordered household, Aristotle explained, was a household that produced enough to allow its members to be free from worry about bare survival. And such a well-ordered household was, Aristotle claimed, the necessary foundation of a well-ordered polis; providing for the necessities of life within the household would allow politics to focus on the good life rather than on mere life. But Aristotle also insisted that the household was not, strictly speaking, a part of the polis. Secondly, both Plato and Aristotle also claimed that a certain biological constitution was necessary if the good life was to be attained, and, according to Plato and Aristotle, the polis must facilitate the cultivation of this biological constitution by, for example, regulating procreation. “Since, then,” Aristotle wrote, “the legislator should see to it from the start that the bodies of children being reared develop in the best possible way, he must first supervise the union of the sexes,

---

and determine what sorts of people should have marital relations with one another, and when”.

The regulation of procreation was something the polis should undertake to ensure that its citizens' bodies were healthy enough to make the good life a possibility. The concern with the necessities of life and the attempt to cultivate healthy bodies indicate that Plato and Aristotle saw mere life as important to political life. But neither would admit that mere life was, strictly speaking, a political concern. It is of vital importance to attend to mere life, but only as a means of attaining the good life, and the good life is of a completely different order than mere life. Mere life is not the goal of the polis. If it was, Aristotle argued, “there could be a city-state of slaves or animals”.

Hobbes’s revolution consisted of introducing an entirely new conception of how and why mere life is a political concern and thereby introducing an entirely new conception of the good life. As I outlined above, Hobbes understood life in terms of motion, and, in particular, motion animated by physiology—human physiology determines human behaviour. Also, Hobbes argued that the self-preservation of the individual was the first order of government. These two claims overturned ancient political philosophy. First, Hobbes argued that the relation between physiology and politics could not be resolved by notions of good breeding and eugenics. Without an understanding of the dynamics of physiology, Hobbes claimed, the very notion of the good life could be nothing but an abstract and even dangerous speculation. An investigation of physiology teaches that the good life has nothing to do with notions of virtue or metaphysical definitions of “the Good”. Physiology impels humans toward pleasure and away from pain. This impulse, Hobbes explained, ensured that there could be nothing like an objective and universal good. “[T]he Felicity of this life,” Hobbes argued, “consisteth not in the repose of a mind satisfied. ... Felicity is a continuall progresse of the desire, from one object to another; the attaining of the former, being still but the way to the latter” (Lev, I, XI, p. 160). The good life is not the virtuous life but the life wherein the individual is able to

---

continually satisfy desire. Secondly, Hobbes overturned ancient political science by claiming that the self-preservation of the individual was the first order of government. Governments must concern themselves with the security and protection of what the Greeks had called mere life. For Hobbes, the individual’s desire for self-preservation was what caused the individual to agree to the formation of government, and the fundamental goal of government was the protection of the individual’s life. Hobbes, then, overturned ancient political philosophy in two important respects: the good life was not a metaphysical concept but was instead linked to the motion of physiology; the very essence of government was the protection of what the Greeks called mere life. Agamben, commenting on this transformation, remarked that, “the entry of zoe into the sphere of the polis—the politicization of bare life as such—constitutes the decisive event of modernity”. As I will argue, this was the decisive event of modernity because it effectively transformed the very nature of what it means to govern.

Hobbes’s understanding of life and its relation to government laid the groundwork for the articulation of a new logic of politics, and the effects of this logic would be wide-ranging. The politicization of life would begin new speculations about the ways in which humans could be governed. The politicization of life would lead to new understandings of power and its effects. Most dramatically, the politicization of life would, by creating a new goal for political power, lead to new accounts of the relationship between the individual and political power. In essence, Hobbes’s revolution marked the beginning of a whole new way of evaluating the limits of the possibilities of the political. Hobbes’s understanding of life established a new framework that could be used both (i) to evaluate and (ii) to organize government. This framework linked the evaluation of government to its ability to protect life, and linked the organization of government to the motion animated by human physiology. But the possibilities opened by Hobbes’s new framework were not exhausted by his Leviathan. After Hobbes, other political theorists would employ his framework. However, they would

— Giorgio Agamben, Homo Sacer, p. 4.
arrive at conclusions very different than Hobbes's. In fact, in a peculiar twist of fate, while Hobbes's framework was almost universally accepted, his political solution was almost universally rejected. Legitimizing this rejection involved proving that the specifics of Hobbes's definition of life were incorrect, largely because the plausibility of Hobbes's political project was anchored to his understanding of life. Proving Hobbes's understanding of life to be incorrect, then, was to prove his political solution incorrect; it was not, however, to abandon Hobbes's claim that mere life was the most basic political issue. It was in this way that the political revolution Hobbes began continued in his wake but at the same time left him behind.

How, exactly, was Hobbes left behind? For Hobbes, life was the most solid of concepts. First, unlike concepts such as justice or the good, the concept of life had political value in that it possessed a certain self-evidence. No one, Hobbes argued, apart from the delusional or the mad, would dispute that the fundamental human goal was self-preservation. This fundamental agreement enabled life, Hobbes claimed, to serve as an irrefutable starting-point for political inquiry—no reasonable individual would disagree with the claim that the fundamental goal of government was the preservation of the individual. Hobbes was somewhat more circumspect concerning his presentation of the dynamics of life. While Hobbes insisted that his general account of the dynamics of human motion was correct—humans are moved toward pleasure and away from pain—he was willing to admit the possibility that the particulars of his own account of the dynamics of life were incomplete and, perhaps in certain respects, inaccurate. But even if incomplete and inaccurate, Hobbes believed his account of the dynamics of life was complete enough to make his own political project unavoidable. Secondly, Hobbes suggested that life was the most solid of concepts because life was something "given". Life and its dynamics were, according to Hobbes, brute facts, and humans could do nothing to escape from or to alter these brute facts. Because these facts could not be eradicated, life and its dynamics were something to which governments had to conform. No power was capable of changing the dynamics of life, so to be successful
governments must respect these dynamics. Life, then, was for Hobbes the most solid of concepts because the dynamics of life could not be manipulated by anything, not even by political power. As something given and unalterable the dynamics of life were, Hobbes suggested, the only truly objective ground upon which to build a peaceful and orderly body politic.

Hobbes, then, presented life as something both self-evident and given. To move beyond Hobbes political theorists had to attack both these assumptions. The assumption that the concept of life possessed a certain self-evidence was attacked insofar as Hobbes has used this assumption to argue that the self-preservation of the individual was the first order of government. After Hobbes, the concept of life was attached to a more general entity—the population—rather than the individual. But though the concept of life was transferred from the individual to the population, the first order of government was still understood to be self-preservation and the protection of life; but the protection of life was no longer viewed as connected to the biological existence of the individual but to the biological existence of the population. Hobbes’s argument that governments must protect life was not left behind, but his claim that the individual was the fundamental political unit was. Hobbes’s second assumption—that the dynamics of life were given and unalterable—was likewise eclipsed. In opposition to Hobbes, later theorists argued that to understand the dynamics of life was to, at least in principle, become capable of manipulating these dynamics. The general outlines of this argument were captured in Descartes’s claim that if we pursued a “practical philosophy” that consisted of, “knowing the force and the actions of fire, water, air, the stars, heavens and all the other bodies that environ us, as distinctly as we know the different crafts of our artisans, we can in the same way employ them in all those uses to which they are adapted, and thus render ourselves the masters and possessors of nature”.5 While Descartes confined

5René Descartes. Discourse on the Method. VI, p. 33. Descartes himself did not inspire the dream of becoming the masters and possessors of human beings. By insisting on a strict separation between mind and body (or mind and extension), Descartes did not allow the operations of the mind to be directly linked to the operations of the body. This separation precluded the possibility of explaining
his argument to the natural world, others claimed that to know the force and action of physiology allowed for the possibility of becoming the “masters and possessors” of human beings. What was needed to become the masters and possessors of human beings was an exhaustive knowledge of the force and action of human physiology. This knowledge could in turn be used to transform life from something given and unalterable into something that could be shaped like an artisan shapes a piece of stone. An exhaustive knowledge of human motion could be used to develop the technological capacity to change the dynamics of human motion.

Coming to grips with the consequences of the revolution begun by Hobbes requires an investigation of the development of the concept of life within modern political philosophy. Given that Hobbes established the framework for modern political philosophy, to this extent he can be called the father of modern political philosophy. But the changing understandings of the concept of life have ensured that Hobbes would not have recognized, nor been able to imagine, the offspring he generated. Though the skeletal structure of Hobbes’s political project remained intact—life is the basic political concern—a political theory very different than that of Hobbes was built around this skeletal structure. While Hobbes used the connection between life and politics to place the individual at the centre of politics, those who came after Hobbes proved him wrong, and their refutation was unanswerable. Hobbes’s basic description of human motion and his basic understanding of the goal of government were not rejected. Instead, the argument against Hobbes went something like the following: ‘Even if Hobbes was correct in his description of human motion, one does not have to accept his conclusions. Hobbes, you see, did not have at his disposal the technological capacity to

\[\text{the mind in terms of matter in motion, as well as the possibility of explaining the mind in terms of the physiology of the body. Hobbes rejected Descartes’s position. But like Descartes, Hobbes did not think it possible to become the “masters and possessors of human beings”. This dream was instead pursued by the materialists of the French Enlightenment. In Chapter 3 I will outline how the materialism of the French Enlightenment was, in part, an attempt to overcome Cartesian dualism and thereby offer a materialist account of the mind, and show that the Enlightenment materialists also went beyond Hobbes by claiming that this materialist account of the mind made it possible to control the mind.}\]
alter this motion. And without this technological capacity, Hobbes could only accept the
dynamics of life as something given. We who possess these capacities, however, are not in
Hobbes’s position. We have the ability to change the very fabric of life. This ability to change
life allows us to imagine political possibilities Hobbes could not see’. This argument is
unanswerable: the invention and refinement of technologies capable of manipulating life did
indeed dramatically extend the possibilities of politics. Political power no longer had to shape
itself in response to the dynamics of life; the dynamics of life could now be shaped in
response to the needs of political power. Around these new political possibilities developed a
new language of right. A government’s capacity to change life was transformed into a
government’s right, even duty, to change life. The task of the government was no longer the
enforcement of the individual’s natural right to self-preservation but the transformation of life
in the effort to cultivate a healthy population.

MEASURING THE HOBBES EFFECT
In his rejection of ancient political philosophy, Hobbes offered the description of a
government that must understand and conform to the dynamics of life to protect the
individual’s existence. For Hobbes, the individual was the basic unit of politics. The
Leviathan was constructed by individuals for the benefit of individuals. And the Leviathan
could not, with authority, attack the life of any individual. After Hobbes, the definition of life
was connected to the idea of the population (or race, or species) and the technological
capacity to change life emerged. As such, the individual became something of an abstraction.
Life became a phenomenon manifest at an aggregate level rather than at the level of the
individual, and governments were empowered to protect the population. The basic political
question thus became: how could governments ensure that the individual and his behaviour
contributed to the overall health of the population, and what was to be done with an
individual who actually degraded the health of the population? In this respect and from the
point of view of the population, the individual assumed the status of a problem. To solve the
problem of the individual, governments were granted the right to use the technological
capacity to change life (i) to ensure that individuals contributed to the health of the population and (ii) to deal with those who could not, or would not conform to this standard. The individual, then, was no longer an end but was approached as a means by which to cultivate a healthy population. Whereas Hobbes had constructed government around the individual, the transformations of Hobbes's definition of life led to the movement of the individual from the centre to the periphery of politics; the individual's relation to government was to be determined by the definition of the healthy population and the extent to which the individual contributed to this health.

This transformation of the individual's status brought to light a concept not present in Hobbes's political philosophy. The idea of the healthy population had as its counterpart the idea of deviant ways of life; if and when a certain behaviour, way of life, or genetic trait was deemed to harm the health of the population, it was labeled as deviant. In a certain respect, this notion of deviance approximated traditional understandings of crime. For example, crime was understood to be a weakening of the body politic, while deviance was understood to be a weakening of the population. But even with this parallel between crime and deviance, in important respects, the notion of deviance had unique political consequences. Political philosophy linked crime and its definition to the idea of the body politic. The body politic had the right to punish crime because crime threatened the very existence of the body politic. Deviance, on the other hand, was linked to a much more ephemeral standard. Deviance, as noted above, was defined in relation to the idea of a healthy population rather than the body politic, and as such deviance did not necessarily represent a threat to the body politic. The label of deviant was not limited to the individual who committed crime, but was extended to any individual who threatened the health of the population. And depending on how the healthy population was defined, the identification of deviance could be quite broad—indeed, much broader than traditional definitions of crime. In protecting the population, governments were no longer simply executing the law but were also given the task of correcting all sorts of forms of deviance. It was this notion of correction that most profoundly altered the relation
between the individual and political power. The individual could now become the target of political power that sought to curtail any example of deviance. Political power was granted the right to regulate the individual in the attempt to correct the individual, but there was also an extreme case that emerged—the incorrigible and dangerous individual. The appearance of the incorrigible and dangerous individual gave rise to the most un-Hobbesian development of modern political philosophy. The incorrigible and dangerous individual was regarded as a "life that does not deserve to live". The incorrigible and dangerous individual was seen as a permanent affront to the health of the population and, as such, should be destroyed. Locke was perhaps the first to articulate this un-Hobbesian idea. As I will explore in detail later in the thesis, Locke argued that the dangerous individual was like a predator and, as such, had forfeited his right to life; predators, because they represent a threat to the population (or, as Locke claimed, humanity as a whole) could and should be destroyed with impunity. With this idea of the dangerous individual, the individual’s right to self-preservation was transformed from a right that had been unlimited into one that was conditional. As Rousseau bluntly stated: "life is not only a kindness of nature, but a conditional gift of the state". One had to earn the gift of life by contributing to the health of the population or if found to be deviant by demonstrating that one had the ability to be corrected.

Both Hobbes's revolution and the transformation that followed have profoundly shaped our world. By joining life and politics, Hobbes began a process that would lead to the articulation and refinement of a new relationship between the individual and political power. The individual who, for Hobbes, had been the basic political unit was replaced by the notion of the population, and politics became the use of power to protect and preserve the population. The effect of this movement from the individual to the population changed the logic of government, and the consequences of this change can be seen in the world around us. This logic can be seen, for example, in the attempt to understand and reform the criminal.

---

This logic can be seen in the development of bio-technologies and in the replacement of the “talking cure” by pharma-psychology. In the most extreme circumstances, this logic can also be seen in the forced sterilization of those deemed “mentally unfit” and in the genocidal impulses that characterize modern war. At times, however, it still seems possible to hear echoes of Hobbes’s own use of the concept of life. For example, some have invoked the Human Genome Project as proof that all humans, regardless of their differences, share a common identity. But such instances really serve as exceptions that prove the rule—that Hobbes’s understanding of life has been eclipsed. In their essence, scientific endeavours such as the Human Genome Project do not really serve to highlight our common identity. Instead, they are monumental attempts to catalogue life to make possible an increasingly sophisticated and effective manipulation of the dynamics of life. How this came to be, and its consequences, are the object of my thesis.

***

In this thesis I explore Hobbes’s revolution and its transformation. To accomplish this I have chosen to isolate three moments in the development of the concept of life within modern political philosophy. I begin with an analysis of Hobbes’s political philosophy, move to an investigation of the political philosophy of Jeremy Bentham, and conclude with an account of Michel Foucault. My analysis of these three philosophers is an attempt to show how the revolution begun by Hobbes evolved in a way he could not have imagined. I want to use Hobbes, Bentham, and Foucault to trace how Hobbes’s ideas of physiology and self-preservation were transformed such that the individual was moved from the centre to the periphery of politics. In undertaking this investigation, I have restricted myself to a history of ideas. Because of limits of time and scope, I was not able to investigate the precise history of the technological innovations that made life into an object to be manipulated. The history of these technologies, however, is essential to explain exactly how the physiology of life was transformed from something given and unalterable into something that can be manipulated by political power. In the absence of such a history, then, my thesis is by no means an exhaustive
account of the history of life in the development of modern philosophy. Instead, my thesis is an attempt to use Hobbes, Bentham, and Foucault to sketch how the transformation of life from something given and unalterable into something to be manipulated by power changed the logic of government. I believe that Hobbes, Bentham, and Foucault provide the most engaging accounts of how the evolving relation between the physiology of life and political power changed the meaning of government, and, for this reason, their respective philosophies can serve to illuminate the development of the revolution begun by Hobbes. By illuminating the development of Hobbes’s revolution, this thesis is merely the beginning of an attempt to come to terms with modernity’s “decisive event”—Hobbes’s introduction of physiology and self-preservation as the foundations of government, and the way these foundations were used to articulate very different accounts of what it means to govern the individual.

In Part I, I begin my investigation of Hobbes’s revolution with an analysis of Hobbes’s political philosophy. Chapter 1 outlines exactly how and why Hobbes used life as the foundation of his political philosophy. In this chapter, I examine Hobbes’s scientific writings, which describe his understanding of motion, and I also explore Hobbes’s assessment of the peculiar dynamics of human motion and the political consequences of these dynamics. In Chapter 2, my focus shifts to Hobbes’s understanding of the best political regime. I show why Hobbes believed that his assessment of the dynamics of life forced one to conclude that only an absolute sovereign could bring about a peaceful body politic. My analysis of Hobbes’s absolute sovereign is intended to set the stage for my investigation of Hobbes’s revolution by highlighting the way in which Hobbes connected life and politics.

I turn, in Part II, to an analysis of Bentham. In the first section of Part II—Transition A—I begin to sketch how Hobbes’s use of physiology and self-preservation were radicalized. Hobbes’s concept of life, I argue, gave rise to certain tensions that political philosophers after Hobbes wanted to overcome. In particular, Hobbes’s claim that the self-preservation of the individual was the first order of government gave rise to what was seen as an antinomy between the rights of the individual and the rights of the state: though the sovereign had the
right to inflict death, the individual also had the natural right to resist the sovereign’s infliction of death. I argue that Locke attempted to solve this antinomy by linking life to the population and claiming that the dangerous individual forfeits his right to life. I then move to an analysis of Bentham to show exactly how Hobbes’s understanding of the connection between physiology and government was transformed. In Chapter 3, I argue that Bentham’s political philosophy can be seen as a radicalization of Hobbes’s. Bentham accepted the basic outline of Hobbes’s account of human motion, but Bentham suggested that Hobbes did not do enough to exploit his discoveries. Bentham pushed Hobbes further by arguing that an exhaustive account of the motion of physiology could be used to construct technologies capable of manipulating life. In Chapter 4 I outline Bentham’s new technology—the Panopticon. I show that Bentham understood the Panopticon to be a new form of power that, based on a scientific account of the dynamics of life, turned life from something given and unalterable into something to be manipulated and transformed by power. Chapter 5, the final chapter of Part II, details Bentham’s proposals for how his new technology should be deployed. Part II concludes with another brief sketch in Transition B. Here I detail the consequences of Bentham’s radicalization of Hobbes and point toward Foucault’s analysis of the relationship between life and power in the modern world.

In the third and final part of my thesis, I look at the philosophy of Foucault. Foucault’s philosophy, I believe, consisted of two different projects—an attempt to outline the development of “technologies of power” that turn the individual into an object to be manipulated, and an attempt to outline the development of “techniques of the self” whereby individuals turn themselves into subjects. My investigation of Foucault’s writings seeks to detail the relationship between these two projects and to outline how these two projects serve to highlight the history and consequences of the radicalization of Hobbes’s understanding of life. Chapters 6 and 7 deal with Foucault’s understanding of the technologies of power that have made possible the manipulation of life. In Chapter 6, I explore how Foucault used the idea of “the normal” to outline the cost of Hobbes’s revolution. Joining life and politics,
Foucault argued, made the goal of politics the use of technologies of power to protect the normal and to correct or destroy the pathological. In Chapter 7, I investigate Foucault’s assessment of exactly how the new technologies of power touch the individual. Here I explore Foucault’s description of exactly how individuals are manipulated in the name of what he called a “project of normalization”. Chapter 7 is followed by Transition C where I outline why Foucault turned from an analysis of the technologies of power to an analysis of the techniques of the self. The techniques of the self, Foucault explained, were the ways in which individuals worked on themselves to turn themselves into subjects. By turning to the techniques of the self, Foucault wanted to move from an exploration of how the technologies of power turned individuals into objects to be manipulated to an exploration of how individuals shape themselves. Chapter 8, then, concerns Foucault’s investigation of the role of the individual in the production of subjectivity. Foucault wanted to highlight the techniques individuals used on themselves to turn themselves into willing participants in the project of normalization, but Foucault also wanted to highlight what he believed were techniques that could be used by the individual to subvert the logic of normalization. I argue that, while not fully persuasive, Foucault’s description of how the individual can subvert the logic of normalization serves as a means of judging the consequences of Hobbes’s revolution, and it also serves to indicate what is to be done if we are to escape these consequences.
Part 1: Hobbes

Introducing Life and Power

To breed an animal with the right to make promises—is not this the paradoxical task that nature has set itself in the case of man? is it not the real problem regarding man? ... Man himself must first of all have become calculable, regular, necessary, even in his own image of himself, if he is to be able to stand security for his own future, which is what one who promises does!

Friedrich Nietzsche, On the Genealogy of Morals
Introduction

Hobbes dreamed of a peaceful commonwealth. What blocked this dream, Hobbes argued, was the nature of human motion. Human motion tends to bring us into conflict with one another and, consequently, human history has been the history of violence and war. Because past political regimes were not built on a scientific understanding of the tendencies of human motion, the disintegration of these regimes was inevitable. Until and unless politics reflects the dynamics of human motion, we would, according to Hobbes, find ourselves within weak regimes torn apart by a struggle for power. This claim was at the heart of Hobbes's own political philosophy. Hobbes wanted to construct a comprehensive account of human motion and use this account as the foundation for a strong and stable regime. Hobbes believed that understanding human motion required a scientific description of human physiology: our physiology, Hobbes explained, determined the dynamics of our motion. The constitution of our bodies was responsible for the way we experience the world, the way we interpret the world, and the particular goals of our actions. Hobbes, then, began his attempt to construct a peaceful commonwealth with an explanation of exactly how physiology generates the particular dynamics of human motion, and exactly why these dynamics give rise to political problems.

In his discussion of human physiology, Hobbes focused his attention on two things: (i) sensation and (ii) the impulses that underlie all motion. When discussing sensation, Hobbes claimed the physiology of the human body prevents us from ever having a direct experience of "things themselves". We do not experience things themselves, but the images or phantasms of things formed by the process of sensation. Hobbes argued that the gap between things themselves and our experience of the world was unbridgeable. Consequently, we are cut off from an experience of objective reality. And physiology not only prevents us
from experiencing objectivity reality, but also determines the impulses that give direction to human motion. Hobbes explained that our physiology—through what he called “vital motion”—impelled humans toward pleasure and away from pain. But though all individuals are attracted by pleasure and repelled by pain, individuals do not find the same objects pleasurable or painful. In fact, there is no natural agreement about what is pleasurable and what is painful: pleasure and pain, though they orient the motion of all individuals, do not provide any overall, specific orientation to human motion. Physiology, then, through the process of sensation, cuts us off from an experience of objective reality, and through vital motion, orients human motion around pleasure and pain without creating any natural agreement about what is pleasurable and what is painful. Hobbes believed that these two consequences of our physiology ensured there was no natural bond that could be used to construct a peaceful commonwealth. Because we never have a direct experience of the objective, peaceful politics cannot rely on the discovery of the true meaning of concepts such as justice and the good. Because there is no natural agreement about the pleasurable and the painful, politics cannot rely on any immediate consensus about what humans should pursue and avoid. According to Hobbes, our physiology places us in a state of permanent tension with others: we do not agree about the pleasurable and the painful, and we cannot settle this dispute by an appeal to objective reality. The construction of a peaceful commonwealth depends on the discovery of an Archimedean point that can overcome the fact that human physiology destroys the possibility of a natural foundation for a peaceful commonwealth.

To find an Archimedean point for the construction of a peaceful commonwealth, Hobbes asked: Even if we cannot agree about the pleasurable and the painful, do we not all
agree that self-preservation is our fundamental goal?\textsuperscript{1} Hobbes believed there would be (close to) universal assent to this statement, and suggested this assent could be used to provide the peaceful commonwealth with a solid foundation. If we agree that self-preservation is our fundamental goal, and if we are persuaded that our physiology and the motion it inspires tends to promote tension and thereby diminish the possibility of self-preservation, then we can be mobilized to redirect our physiological impulses. By following such reasoning, we come to understand that it is not in our interest to blindly pursue the pleasurable. We realize that a blind pursuit of pleasure can only lead toward conflict. And the moment we come to such a realization we have become animals capable of making promises. Hobbes argued that the construction of a particular type of government was the only way to redirect the impulses of physiology. He argued that we must build a sovereign strong enough to police our pursuit of pleasure. The only way to build this sovereign was by promising to obey the commands of the sovereign, an act Hobbes called the social covenant. Only a \textit{voluntary} promise, Hobbes insisted, can grant the sovereign the authority needed to police desire and enforce peace. Hobbes’s best possible sovereign, then, can only be the product of each individual’s realization of the destructive consequences of their natural impulses (i.e., these natural impulses threaten self-preservation), and a promise born of this realization—the promise

\textsuperscript{1}Hobbes had a certain amount of difficulty deciding how to explain the basis of this universal agreement about the fundamental importance of self-preservation. At times he toyed with the idea that human physiology programs us to “shun” death. “For every man is desirous of what is good for him,” Hobbes wrote, “and shuns what is evil, but chiefly the chiefest of natural evils, which is death; and this he doth, by a certain impulsion of nature, no less than that whereby a stone moves downward” (\textit{Civ. I. I. §7. p. 26}). The difficulty with this argument is that even if all individuals naturally “shun” death, it does not follow that all individuals do everything they can to avoid death. Martyrs, soldiers, and individuals who commit suicide, for example, clearly do not avoid death. Moreover, Hobbes realized that the very definition of death was open to interpretation. There is the death of the body, but there is also everlasting death. Hobbes’s seemed to want to avoid the more troubling and perhaps irresolvable ambiguities that surrounded the question of death by focusing on the idea of self-preservation and violent, premature death rather than natural death.
whereby individuals form a social covenant and thereby oblige themselves to a sovereign they themselves have authorized.
Hobbes argued that irresistible power—omnipotence—was the only natural basis for ruling over others. The corollary is that a power falling short of omnipotence, no matter how massive, is never enough to offer its possessor a natural title to rule. According to Hobbes, this was because, in the absence of omnipotence, all relations of power are relations of quantity that can be expressed as a ratio. To claim that “X is powerful” is to claim that “X has more power than Y, and Y has less power than X”. And, Hobbes explained, when power can be expressed as a ratio of “more or less”, relations of power are always liable to reversal; a power that is “more than” is always vulnerable to becoming a power that is “less than”. It is this possibility of reversal that renders contestable any claim to rule based on anything less than omnipotence; it is always possible, through violence in the final instance, to prove such a claim false. Omnipotence, on the other hand, confers a natural title to rule because omnipotence permits no resistance: the claims of omnipotence are uncontestable. To use one of Hobbes’s own examples, while it might be accurate to summarize the relation between God and Job with the ratio “God has more power than Job”, such a summary misses what is essential. What is essential is that God’s omnipotence grants God the irresistible capacity to afflict Job, so God does not have to justify his actions (Lev, II, XXXI, pp. 397-398). God does deign to justify himself to Job, but God, “justified the Affliction by arguments drawn from his Power, such as this, Where wast thou when I layd the foundations of the earth” (Lev,
II, XXXI, p. 398). According to Hobbes, God’s actions toward Job demonstrate that God can afflict Job simply because God has the irresistible capacity to do so. Omnipotence, then, is a form of power that is self-sufficient and self-grounding because by its very nature it permits no opposition.

Hobbes admitted that it was a brute fact that all forms of human power—whether it be the power of an individual or the power of a body politic—will always fall short of omnipotence. And Hobbes argued this brute fact was responsible for the fundamental political problem—war in general, and civil war in particular. The absence of political omnipotence encourages war because, since human power is always a ratio of “more or less”, life is an ongoing attempt to acquire power. Individuals, if they are to have the capacity to protect what they have and to attain what they want—if they are to be confident that they can pursue pleasure and avoid pain—must continually strive to have more power than other individuals. Individuals with more power than me are a threat; individuals with more power can, if they want, block my aspirations, take what I have, and even kill me. This threat causes individuals to continually seek to acquire more power. But because power is always a ratio of more or less, no individual can ever have enough power: it is impossible to dismiss the possibility that someone possesses even more power than me. Hobbes claimed that the permanent possibility of someone with even more power made the individual’s quest to acquire power endless. We are in a continual competition with others over power because no matter how much power one has, an even greater concentration of power is always possible. Each individual must continually attempt to outdo every other individual to avoid being outdone. Hobbes once compared this ongoing attempt to outdo one another to a race. Hobbes, however, cautioned that the analogy of a race “holdeth not in every point” (EL, I, IX, p. 59), for if life is a race for power along the lines proposed by Hobbes, then life is a race without finish and without victory. Given that human power is always a ratio of more or less—i.e., that even more power can always be imagined—the finish line is a mirage continually receding toward the horizon. Indeed, Hobbes claimed that there only seemed to be a rather
unsatisfying resolution to this never-ending attempt to outdo one another—death. "I put for a
generall inclination of all mankind," Hobbes wrote, "a perpetuall and restlesse desire of
Power after power, that ceaseth onely in Death" (Lev, I, XI, p. 161; Cf., EL, I, IX, p. 60).

What is perhaps most surprising about Hobbes’s philosophy is his refusal to label this
never-ending quest for power either abnormal, deviant behaviour or a misunderstanding of
the true goals of human existence. Political philosophers cannot hope to remedy the
destructive consequences of the race for power with speculations about the idea of the good,
nor with metaphysical dissertations on the telos of human nature. Hobbes rejected ancient
political philosophy as, at best, quaint and inadequate or, at worst, self-interested and
dangerous. In opposition to ancient philosophy, Hobbes maintained that the never-ending
quest for power was completely consistent with human nature and must be the starting point
for any meaningful political science. According to Hobbes, political philosophy must begin
with an exhaustive account of exactly why human nature generates a never-ending race for
power, and how this race for power can be contained. The goal of political philosophy,
suggested Hobbes, was to show humanity how to escape the struggle for power by
constructing a type of human power endowed with right. The connection between power and
right caused Luc Foisneau to ask "if it would not be better to use a plural rather than a
singular" when writing about Hobbes’s understanding of power.¹ Foisneau noted that Hobbes
used the term "power" to signify two Latin terms—potentia and potestas. Yves Zarka
summarized the differences between potentia and potestas by writing: “Potentia is in effect
power [puissance] understood ... as [the] present capacity to produce a future act. On the
other hand, potestas signifies power [pouvoir] understood as power [puissance] invested with
right”.² A return to the above discussion of the difference between omnipotence and human

Études de Lexicographie Philosophique. p. 102. (My translation).
²Yves Charles Zarka. La Décision Métaphysique de Hobbes. p. 295. In French, Zarka is able to
capture the two sides of Hobbes’s understanding of power. Puissance is used to denote “power as
capacity” while pouvoir is used to denote “power with right”. (My translation).
power helps reveal what is at stake in the distinction between *potentia* and *potestas*. Omnipotence is a capacity to act—*potentia*—that, by virtue of its irresistibility, does not need to be invested with right—*potestas*—to be effective. As Hobbes noted, God did not need to justify himself to Job. Human power, on the other hand, is a capacity to act that, because always caught within a ratio of more or less, cannot be effective until and unless invested with right. What is needed to overcome the individual race for ever more power is a political power that individuals recognize as authoritative: individuals must be bound together by a collective agreement to recognize governmental power as a power invested with right. Hobbes’s analysis of omnipotence or, more precisely, the absence of omnipotence in human affairs, guided his effort to show how a peaceful commonwealth could become a reality. Because of the absence of omnipotence in human affairs, Hobbes stressed that human power cannot be understood to be force alone—there is no human force strong enough to compel lasting obedience. Instead, human power, if it is to be effective in the long run, must be authorized by those who are its subjects, and this authorization alone can grant human power the right needed to make it truly effective.

**SENSE AND MOTION**

To understand Hobbes’s analysis of power and its problems, one might examine the form in which he chose to cast his story of power. Hobbes argued that philosophy is fundamentally concerned with the investigation of bodies:

> The subject of Philosophy, or the matter it treats of, is every body of which we can conceive any generation, and which we may, by any consideration thereof, compare with other bodies, or which is capable of composition and resolution; that is to say, every body of whose generation or properties we can have any knowledge. *(Cor, I, I, p. 10)*

Hobbes also claimed there are different kinds of bodies, noting:

> two chief kinds of bodies, and very different from one another, offer themselves to such as search after their generation and properties; one whereof being the work of nature, is called a *natural* body, the other is called a *commonwealth*, and is made by the wills and agreement of men. And from these spring the two parts of philosophy, called *natural* and *civil*. *(Cor, I, I, p. 11)*
The importance of the distinction between natural and political bodies is that there are different methods for arriving at knowledge of these different bodies, and this methodological difference separates natural and civil philosophy. All knowledge falls into one of two types: knowledge born of a movement from causes to effects, and knowledge born of a movement from effects to causes. Hobbes claimed we can only know the causes of things that we have created ourselves, arguing that, “the only scientific demonstrations that have been allowed to humans a priori are those of the things whose generation depends on the will of humans themselves” (Hom, 146)\(^3\). Geometry is an example of such an a priori science because, according to Hobbes, humans create the figures of geometry and, “since the creation of these figures depends on our will, to understand that which pertains to any figure whatsoever, all that is required is to consider all that follows from the construction that we ourselves have made in drawing the lines of the figure” (Hom, 146). According to Hobbes, when dealing with political bodies we are able to proceed from causes to effects because we are responsible for the generation of political bodies and, as such, have a special insight into their causes. Political science is like geometry; in both we consider things that we have built ourselves. When dealing with natural rather than political bodies, however, we must always proceed from effects to causes because, since we have not created these natural bodies, we do not have any insight into their causes. This distinction between natural and political bodies complicates the task of arriving at self-knowledge because, as Hobbes claimed, humans are both natural and political bodies. Humans are an amalgamation of what has been given by nature, and what has been given by politics. Hobbes’s political philosophy was designed to highlight how what we have been given by nature shapes the possibilities of what we can become through politics.

\(^3\)This and all subsequent citations of De Homine are my own translations.
On first glance, the fundamental place that Hobbes granted bodies implies that Hobbes's system was built upon an uncomplicated materialism. It is necessary, however, to guard against hasty assumptions. Hobbes's science was built around a strange, even counter-intuitive understanding of bodies. Hobbes defined a body as that, "which having no dependance upon our thought, is coincident or coextended with some part of space" (Cor, II, VIII, p. 102). The essential question is, exactly what does Hobbes mean by that which has "no dependance upon our thought"? Hobbes began his answer by investigating the nature of sensation. Hobbes argued that the process of sensation was rooted in the physiology of the body, and in De Corpore and De Homine, Hobbes attempted to outline the exact nature of sensation. "Sense," Hobbes wrote, "is some internal motion in the sentient, generated by some internal motion of the parts of the object, and propagated through all the media to the innermost part of the organ" (Cor, IV, XXV, p. 390). Sensation is a type of motion that occurs in the organs of sense. When the organs of sense are disturbed by an "object of sense", this disturbance begins motion within the organs of sense that "is propagated through all the

4The connection between Hobbes's materialism (or natural science) and his political philosophy has been a topic of much debate. In the 1930s Leo Strauss argued that Hobbes's political theory owed nothing to his natural science (see, Leo Strauss, The Political Philosophy of Thomas Hobbes. Oxford University Press: Oxford, 1936). A.E. Taylor, also in the 1930s, put forward a similar claim, arguing that Hobbes's moral theory was quite distinct from his natural science (see, A.E. Taylor, "The Ethical Doctrine of Hobbes" in Hobbes Studies, ed. K.C. Brown), a claim echoed by Howard Warrender in the 1950s (see Howard Warrender. The Political Philosophy of Hobbes. Oxford University Press: Oxford, 1957). J.W.N. Watkins disputed these claims. But Watkins did not argue that Hobbes's natural science provided the foundation of his political theory: "Psychological conclusions about thoughts, feelings and wants cannot be deduced from materialistic premises about bodily movements: therefore Hobbes must have made a fresh start when he turned from nature to psychology and politics" (J.W.N. Watkins, "Philosophy and Politics in Hobbes" in Hobbes Studies. ed. K.C. Brown. p. 238). Currently, especially among French interpreters of Hobbes like Yves Zakra, the tendency (to which I subscribe) is to attempt to show that Hobbes's natural science must be seen as the foundation of his political philosophy. Even if Hobbes could not "deduce" psychology from bodily movements (which Hobbes freely admitted), Hobbes insisted that psychology can and must be explained in terms of bodily movements. To separate Hobbes's natural philosophy and his political philosophy, then, is to distort not only the radical quality of his philosophic project, but also his radical account of human nature, thereby underestimating the profound change Hobbes represented regarding the understanding of human behaviour and the control of human behaviour in and through government.
parts of the organ to its innermost” (Cor, IV, XXV, p. 390). This motion is then, from the innermost part of the organ of sense, conveyed by nerves to the brain, and in the brain this motion causes the formation of our perception of the object (which Hobbes calls either an image, phantasm, or phenomenon of the object). This motion is then conveyed from the arteries of the brain to the heart, and the motion begun in the heart causes us to feel either pleasure or pain (Cor, IV, XXV, pp. 390-393). Our contact with the bodies around us and our contact with our own bodies are, Hobbes insisted, always mediated by this process of sensation. How we experience the world and our own bodies is the product of our physiology; experience is formed by the type and number of the organs of sense, and the way in which these organs of sense convey the motion of the object of sense to the brain and the heart.

Hobbes’s description of the process of sensation helps clarify what Hobbes meant by “no dependance upon our thought” in the definition of bodies quoted above. Hobbes made a sharp distinction between our sensations of things and things themselves. Hobbes argued that, “all animated beings begin by judging that this image [i.e., the sensation of something] is the vision of the thing itself” (Hom, 43), and he suggested that this judgement is so natural it is considered to be common sense. The result is individuals continually, “confuse the image with the object itself” (Hom, 43) and will continue do so until someone (i.e., Hobbes himself) has, “the idea of considering light and colour not as emanations from the object, but as phenomena of our interior world” (Hom, 43). Hobbes wanted to prove that when we think we are considering things themselves, we are actually considering the images we form through the process of sensation. Hobbes proposed a radical thought-experiment to confirm this claim. Hobbes asked us to consider the annihilation of everything in the universe, save a single individual. This individual would still have “ideas of the world, and of all such bodies as he had, before their annihilation, seen with his eyes, or perceived by any other sense” (Cor, II, VII, p. 92), and this individual could use these perceptions to construct a scientific account of the world. Hobbes concluded that this demonstrates that those things which had appeared
"as if they were external, and not at all depending on any power of the mind" have been shown to be "nothing but ideas and phantasms, happening internally to him that imagineth" (Cor, II, VII, p. 92). Hobbes promised that if we reflect on this possibility and "observe diligently what it is we do when we consider and reason", it will become apparent that "though all things be still remaining in the world, yet we compute nothing but our own phantasms. For when we calculate the magnitude and motions of heaven and earth, we do not ascend into heaven ... but we do it sitting still in our closets or in the dark" (Cor, II, VII, p. 92). Hobbes believed this thought-experiment proved his claim that all the qualities that are normally used to define bodies—colour, hardness, coldness, taste—are not properties of bodies at all. They are instead the result of our own internal processes of sensation and, as such, they all depend upon thought for their existence.

Given Hobbes's account of sensation, it seems as though we are snared by sensation, forever unable to leap from our images of things to things themselves. To a certain extent this does describe our fate, but Hobbes argued that there is something that stands outside of the process of sensation—motion. Hobbes explained "that whatsoever accidents or qualities our senses make us think there be in the world, they are not there, but are seemings and apparitions only. The things that really are in the world without us, are those motions by which these seemings are caused" (EL, I, II, p. 26). Motion is truly objective because though the origin of sensation it is not captured by sensation. As Hobbes put it, motion is only the "fountain" from which we "derive the phantasm or idea that is made in us by our sense" (Cor, IV, XXV, p. 390). The qualities we attribute to bodies are subjective; our minds are responsible for our construction of a solid and colourful world. Objective reality, then, is not made up of the qualities we normally attribute to bodies, but by motion. An investigation of objective reality thus demands an account of the nature of motion. Frithiof Brandt's claim that, "Hobbes's conception of matter tends toward dissolution into a concept of motion," is
very helpful in this regard. The reality of the world and bodies is captured neither by the common sense understanding of matter—that it has solidity, colour, etc.—nor by more philosophic understandings of matter—that there is a prime matter devoid of any qualities. The underlying reality of the world is not matter but motion. The famous Hobbesian dictum that everything is “matter in motion” can thus be reduced to the dictum that “matter is motion”.

The difficulty with the Hobbesian dictum that matter is motion is that human experience is always a product of sensation; in other words, we never directly experience motion itself but only the effects of motion on our organs of sense. And Hobbes did not believe that we could move directly from the experience of phantasms to a scientific understanding of reality. Hobbes attempted to define the term “body” such that it reflected the gap between things themselves and phantasms, and then use the term to align our experience of the world with the objective reality of the world. Strictly speaking, as Hobbes uses the term, bodies are not solid and colourful—qualities whose existence depends on our minds—but are instead bundles of motion that, as objects of sense, generate movement in our organs of sense. This definition of a body is quite counter-intuitive, a fact that can be seen in the following passage: “The object [of sense] is the thing received; and it is more accurately said, that we see the sun, than that we see the light. For light and colour, and heat and sound,

---


7 Michiel Karskens argued that for Hobbes: “Bodies in themselves have no explanatory value. They function as the metaphysical anchor which secures the link between science and reality. Even in Hobbes’s physics, they are reduced almost completely to a substratum” (Michiel Karskens, "Hobbes’s Mechanistic Theory of Science, and its Role in his Anthropology" in van der Bend, J.G. ed. *Thomas Hobbes: His View of Man*. p. 48). Within Hobbes’s system, bodies themselves are secondary phenomena, and can be explained only in terms of motion. The body, as such, does not exist: it exists only as a philosophic concept.
and other qualities which are commonly called sensible, are not objects, but phantasms in the
sentients” (Cor, IV, XXV, pp. 391-392). When Hobbes writes that it is more accurate to say
“that we see the sun”, he is not referring to the sun we describe as hot and bright, but the sun
as a bundle of motion that generates the phantom sun we describe as hot and bright. In this
passage, Hobbes cannot help but become the victim of the natural attraction between
language and the phantasms of sense. Because human experience is formed by sensation,
when we hear “the sun” we immediately conjure the image of a distant star that provides heat
and light. Hobbes understood this attraction between language and sensation, and his
response was to develop a methodology that can be called empirical rationalism. Hobbes was
an empiricist insofar as he argued that knowledge could only come from experience. But,
since the world we experience and speak about is a world constructed by the memory of past
sensations and one’s passionate response to these memories, experience itself cannot
illuminate things themselves nor objective reality. Hobbes, however, refused to give up the
possibility of constructing a scientific account of objective reality. To do so, Hobbes turned to
a type of rationalism that he thought would allow us to interpret our sensations such that we
could understand the objective reality they concealed. Hobbes’s rationalism was designed to
allow us to come to know an objective reality that we can never directly experience nor
represent.8

8Paul-Marie Maurin highlighted the complexity of Hobbes’s position by comparing Hobbes’s
position to Berkley’s idealism. Maurin explained that to save objectivity, Berkley claimed that God
had structured the laws of sensation such that our sensations naturally correspond to things
themselves. Hobbes, on the other hand, defined objectivity in terms of a residue that cannot be
assimilated by sensation. In his commentary on De Homine, Maurin examined Hobbes’s theory of
vision to explain Hobbes position. Maurin argued that, “when Hobbes defines correct vision by its
objectivity, the term he employs in order to designate light is lumen and not lux. ... Lumen is the
exterior agent of light, lux is the subjective representation of the result of its [lumen] action. That
which Hobbes defined by its objectivity is not lux, it is lumen. It is not the phantasm which is
objective, it is the luminous configuration of which it [the phantasm] is the result” (Hom, p. 52).
Hobbes’s rationalism was designed to teach us how to distil lumen out of lux.
THE DYNAMICS OF ENDEAVOUR

Since sensation creates a barrier separating us from things themselves, things themselves cannot be the starting point for a scientific investigation of reality. Instead, Hobbes argued that language and, in particular, the names we give things must serve as the true beginning of science. Names are both "marks" by which an individual denotes thoughts, and "signs" by which an individual attempts to communicate thoughts to others (Cor, I, II, pp. 13-16; Lev, I, IV, pp. 101-102). Hobbes insisted that names signify thoughts rather than things. "[I]t is manifest," he wrote, "they [names] are not signs of things themselves; for that the sound of this word stone should be the sign of a stone, cannot be understood in any sense but this, that he that hears it collects that he that pronounces it thinks of a stone" (Cor, I, II, p. 17). The essential connection is not between words and things, but between words and thoughts. Because names are the means by which we express what we think about the world, what names denote and, more important, the ways in which names are connected in propositions serve to reveal our assumptions about the nature of things. If we are to use names to arrive at a scientific account of reality, Hobbes argued that we must purify names in and through rigorous definitions. Rigorous definitions, Hobbes maintained, were the only way to ensure that when talking about reality, we truly understood what we were talking about. To guide the process of arriving at rigorous definitions Hobbes constructed a "table" that could be used to identify and avoid instances of 'absurd speech'. A version of this table appears in both Chapter V of the Leviathan and Chapter V of De Corpore and, though there are slight variations between the two, each identifies seven types of absurd speech. Absurd speech occurs whenever words are joined such that they signify something inconsistent. To avoid absurd speech, Hobbes claimed it must be recognized that "all the things to which we give

---

9Regarding Hobbes's theory of language, S. Morris Engel insisted that we must remember, "Hobbes's line of argument does not proceed from language to the body of his philosophy, but from the body of his philosophy to certain facts about language which tend, he thinks, to lend support to that body. The ultimate appeal is philosophical, not linguistic" (S. Morris Engel. "Hobbes's 'Table of Absurdity'" in K.C. Brown, ed. Hobbes Studies. p. 272).
names, may be reduced to these four kinds, namely, **bodies** [i.e., objects], **accidents**, **phantasms**, and **names** themselves; and therefore, in every true proposition, it is necessary that the names copulated, be both of them names of bodies, or both names of accidents, or both names of phantasms, or both names of names. For names otherwise copulated are incoherent” (*Cor*, I, V, p. 58). Absurd speech, then, misrepresents reality by, for example, combining a name of a body/object (i.e., the sun as a bundle of motion) with the name of a phantasm (i.e., the sun as hot and bright). Such a combination of names reflects a confusion about the relation between sense and things themselves. And Hobbes cautioned that: “a man that seeketh precise truth, had need to remember what every name he uses stands for; and to place it accordingly; or else he will find himselfe entangled in words, as a bird in lime-twiggs; the more he struggles, the more belimed” (*Lev*, I, IV, p. 105). Words are, according to Hobbes, a necessary but dangerous tool. Words, when reined in by definitions, are the pathway toward science; but words, when unfettered by definitions, are nothing more than “the mony of fooles” (*Lev*, I, IV, p. 106).

Hobbes wanted to use rigorous definitions to build a science of motion. Not only would such a science offer an account of objective reality, but Hobbes also believed a science of motion was of the highest political concern. Only a full and objective explanation of human motion can highlight the roots of (i) exactly why humans enter into conflict, and (ii) how politics must be organized if this conflict is to be overcome. Hobbes wanted to highlight the “why” of motion, and to do so he moved beyond the mechanics of motion to the dynamics of motion. In his pursuit of the dynamics of human motion, Hobbes’s methodology was to move from the general principles that described the motion of all bodies (i.e., inertia), to the particular principles that described the motion of certain kinds of bodies (i.e., sensation in animate bodies), and, finally, to the singular principles that described the motion of the human body (i.e., desire). As Hobbes presented it, this movement from the general to the singular was necessary because the “why” of human motion is a complex amalgam of many principles. On the one hand, the motion of the human body was determined by the same
general principles that describe the motion of all bodies and some of the particular principles that describe the motion of certain kinds of bodies. To this extent, the motion of the human body shares an identity with, among other things, the motion of a stone or a monkey. On the other hand, however, the motion of the human body is also determined by singular principles that make human motion unique. In other words, the logic of human motion cannot, in its totality, be deduced from the motion of either a stone or a monkey. Hobbes believed that it was the unique motion of the human body that caused politics to be a uniquely human activity. While other insects and animals might form social associations, only humans, asserted Hobbes, form political associations. "[M]an is not just a natural body," Hobbes wrote, "but also belongs to the state; that is to say, if I can put it this way, to a political body. This obliged me to consider him first as man and then as citizen, that is, to bring together the final parts of physics and the first parts of political science" (Hom, p. 32). Constructing a science of human motion was Hobbes's attempt to bring about this fusion of physics and political science.

The concept of endeavour (conatus) was perhaps the most important concept in Hobbes's science of motion. This concept took on such importance because as Hobbes used it, while endeavour applied to all bodies, endeavour could also be used to highlight the qualitative differences between the motion of different bodies. Hobbes began with a definition of endeavour: "I define ENDEAVOUR to be motion made in less space and time than can be given; that is, less than can be determined or assigned by exposition or number; that is, motion made through the length of a point, and in an instant or point of time" (Cor, III, XV, p. 206). Endeavour is an infinitesimally small motion that can be neither quantified, nor apprehended by sensation. Hobbes suggested that because endeavour cannot be apprehended by sense, endeavour was granted an unusual position. Because endeavour itself cannot be sensed, it cannot be turned into a phantasm of sense and, in this respect, endeavour can serve as an objective bedrock for a science of motion. Yet, the very feature that allows endeavour to act as an objective bedrock—its imperceptibility—introduces a problem: how can we
come to know something we can never sense? Hobbes argued that we could come to know endeavour because while it is never a direct object of sense, it is indirectly connected to sense. The function of endeavour is to act as what Hobbes called the “small beginnings of Motion” (*Lev*, I, VI, p. 119). All sensible motion is the effect of the insensible motion of endeavour: sensible motion, then, is not the product of any incorporeal essence, but is itself the result of the motion of endeavour. The motion of all bodies is caused by endeavour, and to grasp the dynamics of this motion, one must come to terms with endeavour. Having defined endeavour as the very beginning of motion, Hobbes then moved on to outline exactly how endeavour could become the object of scientific study.

In explaining how the analysis of endeavour was to take place, Hobbes wrote of his own efforts, “I do not here examine things by sense and experience, but by reason” (*Cor*, III, XV, p. 217). Hobbes insisted on this distinction between sense/experience and reason in the analysis of endeavour, and it is because of this distinction that Hobbes’s empiricism took on a rationalistic dimension. The concept of endeavour does not grow directly out of experience but is instead a logical category constructed to allow us to understand the objective reality concealed by experience. The analysis of endeavour, then, cannot proceed by moving from the phantasms of sense to speculation about their underlying causes. Such speculation, Hobbes believed, would do little more than reinforce the common sense understanding of reality. Instead, the analysis of endeavour takes place through speculative reason, which must be guided by (i) precise rules and (ii) a clear understanding of the status of endeavour. Regarding Hobbes’s first caveat, the rule that must guide the analysis of endeavour is that endeavour is a comparative phenomenon. The endeavour of one body can only be grasped by

---

10 J.W.N. Watkins noted that this aspect of Hobbes’s concept of endeavour was important in Hobbes’s attacks upon Descartes. In particular, Watkins pointed out that endeavour enabled Hobbes to avoid Descartes’s mind/body duality. Watkins wrote: “That problem [the mind/body duality] was created by the absolute antithesis between *extended* body and *unextended* mind. Hobbes’ endeavour-concept enabled him to overcome this antithesis by ascribing *non-extensional* properties to bodies” (K.C. Brown, ed. *Hobbes Studies*, p. 251).
examining how this body interacts with other bodies. Regarding his second caveat, Hobbes was clear that endeavour is a logical category constructed to facilitate the investigation of motion. Following these two caveats, Hobbes’s analysis of endeavour consisted of the attempt to compare different manifestations of a logical category, a task Hobbes insisted was legitimate: “as a point may be compared with a point, so one endeavour may be compared with another endeavour” (Cor, III, XV, p. 207). For Hobbes, a point was a logical category created to facilitate the analysis of motion. “Though there be no body which has not some magnitude,” Hobbes explained, “yet if, when any body is moved, the magnitude of it be not at all considered ... the body itself [is called] a point; in which sense the earth is called a point” (Cor, II, VIII, p. 111). The abstraction of a point is a means of reducing motion to a single dimension, a procedure that Hobbes argued facilitated the discovery of the mechanics of motion. To consider the mechanics of the revolution of the earth, simply reduce the earth to a point and speculate about what the rules of motion must be if they are to explain the motion of this point; to consider the mechanics of interacting bodies, reduce them both to points and speculate about what the rules of motion must be if they are to explain the relations between these two points. Formally, Hobbes’s analysis of endeavour closely followed this description of the use of points. Like a point, an endeavour is a logical category that we create and that can, by reducing motion to its essence, be used to facilitate speculation about the rules of motion. There is, however, an essential difference between points and endeavours. Whereas points are to be used to speculate about the mechanics of motion, endeavours are to be used to speculate about the dynamics of motion. While the mechanics of motion can be grasped by reducing motion to a single dimension, one can never lose sight of

Frithiof Brandt, in *Thomas Hobbes’ Mechanical Conception of Nature*, discussed the meaning of this statement, and remarked that Hobbes’s claim must be that “the mathematical point does not exist, but that every point has its extension, greater or smaller, and that these differences, although incommensurable with finite qualities, are commensurable for the points themselves” (p. 297). “What Hobbes wants to make clear by the conatus concept”, Brandt concluded, “is not merely the idea of an infinitely small motion, and that this motion may be greater or less within the domain of the infinitely small, but also that the various conatus may have different dynamic values” (ibid. p. 299).
concrete bodies if the dynamics of motion are to be understood. For this reason, endeavour is not a tool used to simplify motion but a conceptual tool that facilitates the answering of particular questions. Hobbes used the concept of endeavour to give an account of motion that could explain a body's (i) capacity and (ii) propensity to occupy a particular place.

To explain a body's capacity to occupy a particular place, Hobbes introduced several concepts—impetus, resistance, pressure, restoration, and force—that were all derived from the concept of endeavour. Hobbes defined impetus as, "nothing else but the quantity or velocity of endeavour" (Cor, III, XV, p. 207). Impetus, or the quantity of endeavour, can only be determined by examining the interactions of actual bodies and, in this respect, impetus is a relative rather than absolute concept. In his discussion of impetus, Hobbes never proposed a mathematical formula by which to measure impetus; he instead outlined the consequences of the impetus of one body being equal, more, or less than the impetus of another body. The concepts of resistance, pressure, restoration, and force were used by Hobbes to clarify these consequences. "I define RESISTANCE," Hobbes wrote, "to be the endeavour of one moved body either wholly or in part contrary to the endeavour of another moved body, which toucheth the same" (Cor, III, XV, p. 211). Pressure occurs when one body comes into contact with another and "with its endeavour it makes either all or part of the other body to go out of its place" and restoration happens to a body that has been pressured.

---

12 It should be noted that Hobbes used the term "quantified endeavour" in a peculiar way. Since endeavour is "infinitely small", endeavour cannot really be measured. When Hobbes wrote about "quantified endeavour" what he had in mind was a ratio that can be used to compare endeavours. In this respect, Hobbes's quantification of endeavour is similar to his quantification of power. Endeavour, like power, is not to be measured according to some fundamental unit but according to a ratio of "more or less". In what follows, I will show how Hobbes used the concepts of resistance, pressure, restoration, and force as a way of determining whether the endeavour of one body was more or less than the endeavour of another body.

13 Yves Zarka used this to compare Hobbes and Leibnitz regarding the invention of calculus. Zarka wrote that with Hobbes, "the infinitely small does not yet have the differential status that it will have in Leibnitz's mature physics" (La Décision Métaphysique de Hobbes. p. 205). Hobbes, unlike Leibnitz, did not provide the grounds for a mathematization of objective reality because Hobbes's concept of endeavour defied measurement and could thus never become an object of mathematical analysis.
“when the pressing body is removed, they do, by some force within them ... give their whole body the same figure it had before” (Cor, III, XV, pp. 211-212). Finally, force is the degree to which “movement works more or less upon the body that resists it” (Cor, III, XV, p. 212). The greater the impact one body makes upon another body, the greater the force that body possesses. These concepts raise particular questions about the way in which the motion of a body will influence the motion of another body. How much pressure can a body endure, and under what conditions is it capable of restoring itself? Under what conditions will bodies attempt to force one another to give way? And what determines success and failure in this contest? The initial answer is that when bodies come into contact, it is the impetus—the quantified endeavour—of each body that determines the outcome. If two bodies with equal impetus resist one another, no force will be exerted because equal impetus can only bring about stalemate. If two bodies with unequal impetus resist one another, however, the body with the greater impetus will exert force.\(^{14}\)

Endeavour, then, in the first instance, signifies the capacity of a body to occupy space either by displacing another body or by remaining on course when touched by another body. This use of the concept of endeavour, however, does not explain why bodies enter into relations of resistance, nor does it explain why relations of resistance sometimes result in the destruction of one or both bodies. The concepts of impetus, resistance, pressure, restoration, and force only explain a body’s capacity to occupy space; they are silent about why a body has a propensity to occupy a particular place.

When looked at from the point of view of capacity, endeavour endows bodies with “solidity”; it is the quantity of endeavour that determines whether or not a body will be able to resist the incursion of another body. When looked at from the point of view of propensity,

\(^{14}\)It is important to distinguish force and power. Force is a kind of power, but force does not represent the entire scope of power. Force is power in that, like power, it occurs when one body is able to alter the motion of another body. However force always concerns direct bodily contact, whereas power is capable of “action at a distance”. Hobbes included things such as wealth, reputation, and eloquence among his examples of power because each can be used to alter the motion of others even though they do not directly touch the body of the other. In this sense, power is a far broader category than force.
however, Hobbes argued that endeavour endows bodies with direction. For Hobbes, “direction” did not mean “purpose”. Hobbes argued that the widespread belief that motion is purposive was the result of a (deliberate) misinterpretation of human motion. People want to believe that they are free, purposive agents, and this belief tends to be extended to nature as a whole. “For men measure, not only other men, but all other things, by themselves”, Hobbes explained. A belief in human purposiveness leads to claims such as, “Heavy bodies fall downwards, out of an appetite to rest, and to conserve their nature in that place which is most proper for them”, which is nothing more than, “ascribing appetite, and Knowledge of what is good for the conservation, (which is more than man has) to things inanimate absurdly” (Lev, I, II, p. 87). In the face of such claims, Hobbes insisted that the direction of motion was not a matter of choice but of the compulsion of endeavour. And Hobbes argued that humans, like all other bodies, are compelled by endeavour to move in a certain direction. The compulsion of endeavour meant that humans were not moved by anything like the free will. Instead, “LIBERTY, or FREEDOME, signifieth (properly) the absence of Oppositions; (by Oppositions, I mean externall Impediments of motion;) and may be applyed no lesse to Irrational, and Inanimate creatures, than to Rationall” (Lev, II, XXI, p. 261). Freedom, then, is nothing more than the unhindered pursuit of endeavour. Hobbes argued that in light of his definition of freedom:

Liberty and Necessity are Consistent: As in the water, that hath not only liberty, but a necessity of descending by the Channel: so likewise in the Actions which men voluntarily doe; which ... proceed from liberty; and yet because every act of mans will ... proceedeth from some cause, and that from another cause, which causes in a continuall chaine ... proceed from necessity. (Lev, II, XXI, p. 263)

Water endeavours to descend by the channel not out of any sense of purpose, but because it cannot do otherwise. Humans, like water, are driven by endeavour along a certain path, and, strictly speaking, are free only to the extent that their progress along this path is unhindered. Hobbes argued that it was the driving force of endeavour that accounted for a body’s propensity to occupy a particular place; bodies are compelled toward certain places by
endeavour, and there is no way to avoid this compulsion. "All endeavour," Hobbes asserted, "whether strong or weak, is propagated to infinite distance; for it is motion" (Cor, III, XV, p. 216). It was upon this understanding of the compulsion of endeavour that Hobbes built his argument about exactly why bodies enter into relations of resistance. When two bodies are compelled by endeavour toward the same place at the same time, these two bodies will necessarily collide. The result of this collision depends in part upon the quantities of their respective endeavours, but also in part on the qualities of their respective endeavours. A body can, and will give way to a greater force when its endeavour allows it to do so; but when endeavour compels a body to remain in place even when faced with a superior force, relations of resistance become relations of destruction. Hobbes argued that human endeavour compelled human beings to be drawn into conflict with one another. The quality of human endeavour, Hobbes explained, compelled individuals toward the same place at the same time, which resulted in the logic of human motion causing human relations to be not only relations of resistance and force, but also relations of destruction.

To outline the quality of human endeavour, Hobbes turned to what he called "vital motion". For Hobbes, vital motion was connected to human physiology. Hobbes defined vital motion as, "the motion of the blood, perpetually circulating ... in the veins and arteries" (Cor, IV, XXV, p. 407). This vital motion was common to all animals and was "begun in generation, and continued without interruption through their whole life" (Lev, I, VI, p. 118). Hobbes, however, did not directly identify vital motion and endeavour. Vital motion only becomes endeavour when vital motion is either "helped" or "hindered". Objects, when they touch an animal's body, begin a motion that is "propagated to the heart", and this motion "must necessarily make some alteration or diversion of vital motion" that, "when it helpeth, it is pleasure; and when it hindereth, it is pain, trouble, grief, &c" (Cor, IV, XXV, p. 406). These alterations of vital motion become endeavour insofar as they give rise to "voluntary motions" by which an animal is impelled toward objects associated with pleasure and
repelled by objects associated with pain. Animal endeavour, then, moves in two directions and “when it tends toward such things as are known by experience to be pleasant is called appetite ... and when it shuns what is troublesome, aversion” (Cor, IV, XXV, p. 407). This endeavour is, according to Hobbes, “found even in the embryo; which while it is in the womb, moveth its limbs with voluntary motion, for the avoiding of whatsoever troubleth it, or for the pursuing of what pleaseth it” (Cor, IV, XXV, p. 407). Animal endeavour is the objective foundation of human motion, and it compels humans toward pleasure and away from pain. But even though the general pursuit of pleasure and avoidance of pain have their roots in the objectivity of motion, Hobbes maintained that the actual pursuit of pleasure and pain contains an important subjective dimension. In all animals, sensation is the guide to what in particular is pleasurable and painful. While objects—i.e., things themselves—might be the direct causes of pleasures and pains, animal appetites and aversions are always linked to the phantasms of sense. In fact, Hobbes even argued that the sensation of an object was prior to the feeling of pleasure and pain. In his description of the process of sensation, Hobbes claimed that the motion begun in the organ of sense by the object of sense travelled first to the brain where it was turned into a phantasm, and only then was this motion propagated to the heart where it produces a feeling of pleasure or pain. Hobbes argued that by observing newborns we can verify that sensation is the guide to the pleasurable and the painful. Hobbes wrote:

little infants, at the beginning and as soon as they are born, have appetite to very few things, as also they avoid very few, by reason of their want of experience and memory .... For it is not possible, without such knowledge as is derived from sense, that is, without experience and memory, to know what will prove pleasant or hurtful; only there is some place for conjecture from the looks or aspects of things. And hence it is, that though they do not know what may do them good or harm, yet

---

15As he did with freedom, Hobbes redefined “voluntary”. An involuntary motion is one that does not depend on the imagination, such as breathing. A voluntary motion, on the other hand, is not a motion begun by choice, but a motion that depends on the imagination. In other words, a voluntary motion always involves a phantasm of sense, a fact that, as I will outline, introduces a subjective dimension into human endeavour.
sometimes they approach and sometimes retire from the same thing, as their doubt prompts them. (Cor, IV, XXV, pp. 407-408)

Newborns cannot adequately respond to the motions that generate pleasure and pain because they have not had enough time to connect the feelings of pleasure and pain to the phantasms of sense; only through experience and memory are pleasure and pain linked to phantasms. Given the role of experience, Hobbes concluded that the explanation of endeavour compelling humans to pursue pleasure and avoid pain did not exhaust the complexity of human motion. To fully outline the dynamics of human motion, Hobbes turned to investigating exactly how the objectivity of pleasure and pain is united with the subjectivity of human sensation in and through human experience.

THE PRIVILEGE OF ABSURDITY

The subjective dimension of pleasure and pain became the crucial element in Hobbes's account of human endeavour. Hobbes attempted to capture this subjective dimension by constructing a "physiological-psychological" account of human nature. Physiology is responsible for the phantasms of sense as well as the feelings of pleasure and pain, but Hobbes believed that human psychology was responsible for our interpretation of these physiological facts. In the Leviathan, Hobbes provided his most concise and sophisticated description of the physio-psychology of human endeavour. Opening the Leviathan with a discussion of sense, Hobbes claimed in the first chapter of the Leviathan, "Of Sense", that the human body is, in the first instance, passive, arguing that "The cause of Sense, is the External Body, or Object, which presseth the organ proper to each Sense" (Lev, I, I, p. 85).

Our first image of the human self is as a passive receptacle bombarded by the external world, and this image corresponds with the description of the mechanics of sense in De Corpore, which I have outlined above. But in the Leviathan, Hobbes's discussion of sense moved further. In De Corpore, the mechanics of sensation were discussed insofar as they exist in all sentient bodies. In the Leviathan, however, Hobbes wanted to outline the unique qualities of human sensation. To do so, Hobbes virtually ignored the mechanics of sensation, turning
instead to the relationship between sensation and thought. At the most basic level, sense and thought are related because it is through sensation that thought acquires content. "For there is no conception in a mans mind," Hobbes argued, "which hath not at first, totally, or by parts, been begotten by the organs of sense" (Lev, I, I, p. 85). The phantasms of sense, when retained in our memory and imagination, become the matter of thought. Through experience, as the example of the newborn illustrates, we gather together more and more memories and imaginations. The result is prudence, which, according to Hobbes, is nothing more than a large collection of memories and imaginations that enable an individual to see the phantasms of sense as "signs". As signs, phantasms point beyond themselves, either toward other phantasms that are "the Event Antecedent, of the Consequent; and contrary, the Consequent of the Antecedent, when the like Consequences have been observed, before" (Lev, I, III, p. 98), or toward the internal motions of pleasure and pain. As memory increases, we become more prudent because as we become more certain that specific phantasms signal specific consequences it becomes easier to navigate though the world. But memory and prudence are not uniquely human qualities. "There be beasts," Hobbes observed, "that at a year old observe more, and pursue that which is for their good, more prudently, than a child can do at ten" (Lev, I, I, p. 98). What is unique to humans, Hobbes argued, is the ability to move beyond memory and prudence and to reason about the phantasms of sense.

Hobbes wrote that humans, "excell all other Animals in this faculty, that when he conceived of any thing whatsoever, he was apt to enquire the consequences of it, and what effects he could do with it. And now I add this other degree of the same excellence, that he can by words reduce the consequences he finds to general rules, called Theorms, or Aphorisms" (Lev, I, V, p. 113). It is the ability—or perhaps the compulsion—to inquire about the causes of things that differentiates humans from other animals. Humans are not satisfied with prudential considerations about causality; humans desire to know exactly why certain consequences occur. Humans are unique because they are curious about the world in a way other animals are not, and cannot be. This curiosity about causality is a privilege because it
enables humans, unlike other animals, to determine why a certain effect is produced by a certain cause, and this knowledge allows humans to shape the world. This privilege of curiosity comes at a price, however. Hobbes warned that, “this privilege, is allayed by another; and that is, by the privilege of Absurdity; to which no living creature is subject, but man only” (Lev, I, V, p. 113). Absurdity is the price of curiosity because our ability to speculate about the causes of things also gives us the ability to make errors about these causes; and, since humans are cut off from objective reality by the physiology of sensation, it is all too easy to make such errors. Hobbes was not simply concerned with isolated errors. Rather than making isolated errors, humans have the tendency to construct entire stories, myths, and cosmologies about causality that have no relation whatsoever to objective reality. These absurd fantasies are much more dangerous than isolated errors because these fantasies can be both logical and compelling in spite of their absurdity. In fact, Hobbes suggested that “of men, those are of all most subject to it [absurdity], that profess Philosophy” (Lev, I, V, p. 113) and concluded that most philosophy is an example of logical and compelling absurdity. It is the privilege of absurdity that makes the dynamics of human endeavour unique. Only humans are able to invent fantastic stories about experience and orient their lives based on these fantastic stories. Because our physiology cuts us off from the objective, we are prone to misunderstand reality. However, Hobbes saw our psychology more than our physiology as the root of our tendency to invent and believe absurd tales. While physiology perhaps explains why we tend to gravitate so readily toward absurdity, physiology alone cannot explain why we so tenaciously cling to our absurdities. Hobbes turned to psychology to outline exactly why the absurd has such a powerful hold over the human mind.

Hobbes outlined the psychological conditions that make absurdity so powerful in Chapter XII of the Leviathan, entitled “OF RELIGION”. Hobbes remarked that, “SEEING there are no signs, nor fruit of Religion, but in Man only; there is no cause to doubt, that the seed of Religion, is also onely in Man” (Lev, I, XII, p. 168). At first, Hobbes argued that this seed of religion is the same curiosity outlined above, namely the curiosity “to be inquisitive into
the Causes of the Events” (Lev, I, XII, p. 168). But in the context of religion, Hobbes pushed his inquiry further and began to speculate about the psychological roots of human curiosity. He argued that while curiosity is in “some more, some less”, it is in “all men so much, as to be curious in the search of the causes of their own good and evill fortune.” (Lev, I, XII, p. 168). Curiosity, then, is not exactly born of wonder, but of self-interest. The key to understanding the profound psychological effects of the curiosity about one’s own “good and evill fortune” was, Hobbes claimed, that this self-interest is not confined to the actual or near present as it is with other animals—“there is no other Felicity of Beasts, but the enjoying of their quotidian Food, Ease, and Lusts” (Lev, I, XII, p. 169)—but is instead projected far into the future. This orientation toward the distant future creates anxiety because the individual, “which looks too far before him, in the care of future time, hath his heart all the day long, gnawed on by the feare of death, poverty or other calamity; and has no pause of his anxiety, but in sleep” (Lev, I, XII, p. 169).16 Because human curiosity is projected into the future, humans are anxious animals, and we are compelled to understand the causes of things because we want to be able to understand and control the future. It is our orientation toward the future, which is “but a fiction of the mind” (Lev, I, III, p. 97)17, that allows our absurd worlds to take shape. Because of our anxiety, the space of the future becomes a space of pure creativity. Our concern for the future leads us to construct absurd projects based upon (mis)interpretations of the causes of things. It is the anxiety about the future that transforms

16The most pressing anxiety is the fear of death. This fear has two sides: (i) the death of the body and (ii) the afterlife. Hobbes occupies an interesting position regarding this fear of death. On the one hand, as we will see, he attempted to make the fear of the death of the body as the beginning of political wisdom. On the other hand, Hobbes tried to avoid questions about the afterlife because such questions are, in principle, capable of undermining the body politic. Questions about the afterlife allow religion to assume a position of great authority in human affairs. Questions about the afterlife highlight that whereas a political ruler controls the life and death of the body, a religious ruler can control the individual’s everlasting life and death.

17In full, Hobbes argued: “The Present onely has a being in Nature; things Past have a being in the Memory onely, but things to come have no being at all; the Future being but a fiction of the mind, applying the sequels of actions Past, to the actions that are Present; which with most certainty is done by him that has most Experience; but not with certainty enough” (Lev, I, III, p. 97).
Chapter 1: The Impotence of Objectivity

humans as rational animals who have the capacity to understand the causes of things into creative animals who invent causes in the hope of overcoming our most fundamental fears.

It is, then, the desire to lessen the anxiety born of an uncertain future that makes humans ripe for absurdity. To alleviate anxiety about the future, individuals need stories about the nature of causality and will gravitate toward any, even absurd, stories about causality. The gnawing fear of the future—the fear of death and calamity—ensures that when an individual “cannot assure himself of the true causes of things, (for the causes of good and evill fortune for the most part are invisible,) he supposes causes of them, either such as his own fancy suggesteth; or trusteth to the Authority of other men, such as he thinks to be his friends, and wiser than himselfe” (Lev, I, XII, p. 169). This fanciful creation of causes, Hobbes mused, might have been the original impulse for the creation of the gods. “This perpetual fear, alwayes accompanying mankind in the ignorance of causes, as it were in the Dark,” Hobbes remarked, “must needs have for object something. And therefore when there is nothing to be seen, there is nothing to accuse either of their good, or evill fortune, but some Power, or Agent Invisible” (Lev, I, XII, p. 170). Just as nature abhors a vacuum, our minds abhor the absence of stories about causality, and when we cannot immediately see causes, we will invent invisible powers that are invoked as the forces controlling our destinies. The real power of these absurd stories, Hobbes implied, resides in the fact that it is easier and quicker to alleviate anxiety by inventing causes than by engaging in a scientific analysis of causality. Given our psychological orientation toward an uncertain future, time is of the essence in the search for causes; the future and its uncertainty press relentlessly upon the individual, leaving little room for the disinterested contemplation demanded by science. We cling so tenaciously to the absurd stories we invent because they are the way we assuage our deepest fears.

Interestingly enough, while Hobbes argued that fear can account for the origins of the “Gods of the Gentiles”, he also claimed that “the acknowledging of one God Eternall, Infinite, and Omnipotent, may be more easily derived, from the desire men have to know the causes of naturall bodies ... than from the feare of what was to befall them in time to come” (Lev, I, XII, p. 170). Hobbes argued that this is the case because individuals who posit a “first mover” that must lie behind the very beginning of motion, do so, “without thought of their fortune” (Lev, I, XII, p. 170).
Hobbes believed that this psychological compulsion toward the absurd played a large role in the dynamics of human endeavour. As I have outlined above, human endeavour compels humans toward pleasure and away from pain. Vital motion is, according to Hobbes, the objective ground of pleasure and pain, but there is a gap between the objective sources of pleasure and pain and our subjective representations of these sources. The privilege of absurdity takes advantage of this gap. Because we do not have any direct experience of objective reality, we all too often invent stories that bear little relation to reality. And, Hobbes insisted, absurd stories can provide a compelling explanation for even the most seemingly objective pleasures and pains. Such is the case, for example, when the pain caused by disease is interpreted as the effect of demons. Hobbes sardonically remarked, “That there were so many Dæmoniaques in the Primitive Church, and few Mad-man, and other such singular diseases; whereas in these time we hear of, and see many Mad-men, and few Dæmoniaques, proceeds not from the change of Nature; but of Names” (Lev, IV, XLV, p. 664). In fact, the most seemingly objective pains are the ripest ground for absurdity. Intense suffering tends to inspire intense fear, and intense fear makes us willing to accept absurd tales. Those experiencing such suffering are willing to accept absurd tales in the hope of escaping pain, and those witnessing such suffering accept such absurd tales in the hope of avoiding a similar fate. In the case of disease, absurdity preys on the individual’s fear of death, and the corresponding fear of contagion and epidemic. Action inspired by such absurd interpretations, while responding to something objective, is purely subjective in direction. The fear that makes absurdity so powerful does not so much override the objectivity of motion as it renders objectivity incapable of directing the course of human motion. On its own, objectivity cannot lead us in any particular direction, because objectivity is always shaped by the interpretive lens of the individual. The uniqueness of human endeavour is that the motion it inspires is guided by a subjective interpretation of causes aimed at eliminating anxiety about the future.
Within Hobbes's system, the story of power and politics is embedded within the more general story of the impotence of objectivity. Hobbes, who is so often depicted as an uncomplicated materialist and mechanist, constructed a complex analysis of the relation between objectivity and subjectivity. Objectivity does exist, according to Hobbes, but not in the form we usually believe it to assume. Bodies, which appear as objective and external, are in fact the result of the internal, physiological process of sensation; and sensation acts as a barrier between ourselves and what is truly objective—motion. Furthermore, when it comes to human endeavour, the motion it inspires is shaped more by absurdities than by anything objective. Objectively, human motion is the product of endeavours, which compels humans toward pleasure and away from pain; but because our interpretations of the world usually have little to do with objective reality, endeavour can give rise to almost any imaginable action. In highlighting these dynamics of human motion, Hobbes wanted to find a way to replace absurd accounts of reality with a scientific account; for we are, insisted Hobbes, rational animals. Reason, when used properly, can provide us with a clear vision of the nature of things. All too often, however, reason is used improperly because it is guided by our anxiety about the future. When reason is guided by anxiety, it generates absurdities; and, in this respect, reason leads us away from, rather than closer to, objective reality. Power and politics exist in a world in which the objectivity of motion is prey to the subjective interpretations of causes. The building of a truly stable and truly peaceful commonwealth, Hobbes believed, involved the attempt to replace absurdity with a scientific understanding of reality and a scientific understanding of the causes of our own behaviour.

Hobbes's system was designed to make possible such a scientific understanding. Hobbes wanted to unsettle common sense by highlighting the gap that exists between things themselves and our thoughts about the world.\(^\text{19}\) If we are to learn to “Read thy self” (Lev,
Introduction, p. 82), we must first learn to guard against absurdity by making rigorous distinctions between what is truly objective and what is subjective. Motion alone is objective, and all our phantasms, though born of motion, are products of the mind. While the world we experience appears to be external and to be autonomous from our thoughts, it is really a construction of the thoughts we form in and through the process of sensation. Hobbes suggested that, without realizing it, we are the creators of the world. The lack of awareness of our role in the creation of the world was, in Hobbes’s opinion, the problem that must be resolved if we are to ever engage in the task of building a new type of political reality. This lack of awareness prevents us from seeing the self-imposed veils that we use to hide what we truly are. Hobbes attempted to overcome these problems by seeking a new foundation for political science in the analysis of human motion. To conceptualize the dynamics of motion is the only means of arriving at an objective understanding of what we are, because motion alone is independent of the mind. Hobbes wanted to use his account of human motion to show us that much of what we think about the world and about ourselves is absurd and that only by looking at ourselves honestly can we become capable of bringing about the construction of a new political reality.

also sense telleth me, when I see by refection, that colour is not in the object” (EL, I, II, p. 26). Phenomena such as refraction and reflection amount to sensory evidence that there is indeed a distinction between phantasms and things themselves.
As Hobbes described it, objectivity is like a *deus absconditus* that, having begun motion, vanishes and allows our interpretations of the world to take over. In the absence of objectivity, human relations are structured by the phantasms born of sensation and desire and by our interpretations of the causes of these phantasms—and herein lies the basic political problem. At the logical extreme, humans are atoms moved by pleasure and pain. This atomism, Hobbes argued, is at the root of the struggle for power that characterizes human life. In the attempt to pursue their own pleasures and to flee their own pains, each and every individual looks upon each and every other individual as a possible obstacle. And the impotence of objectivity ensures there is no simple solution to this difficulty: there is no objective standard that can be used to harmonize, or to adjudicate between different human desires. In fact, the most basic terminology of political philosophy—justice, the good, happiness—is, according to Hobbes, just so much posturing. Political philosophy, Hobbes insisted, is usually little more than the art of wrapping of one's own desires in a guise of objectivity. He wrote of the ancient "schools" of philosophy: "Their Morall Philosophy is but a description of their own Passions. ... Their Logique which should bee the Method of Reasoning, is nothing else but Captions of Words, and Inventions how to puzzle such as should goe about to pose them" (*Lev*, IV, XLVI, p. 686). When reading philosophy, Hobbes continued, we must follow the lead of the Roman judge who would demand, "*Cui bono*" (*Lev*, IV, XLVII, p. 704), because only by uncovering who benefits from a particular philosophical doctrine can we understand why it was developed. Hobbes sought to remedy this defect of philosophy. First, his own political philosophy would have to fully face the impotence of objectivity. Secondly, his own political solution would have to be more than a sectarian attempt to impose an individual understanding of justice and the good upon the
entire world. To accomplish all of this would result in the first political philosophy that could, when asked "cui bono", answer, "everyone".

**DESIRE, PERSONATION, AND AUTHORITY**

Hobbes used his account of human physiology and psychology to build a theory about human behaviour. But Hobbes argued that it was impossible to use his account of physiology to predict the behaviour of *individuals*. While it is possible to understand that human behaviour is structured by a pursuit of pleasure and an avoidance of pain, it is impossible to determine with certainty which objects an individual views as promising pleasure or promising pain. Knowledge about the specific objects of an individual’s desire is close to impossible because, “the constitution individuall, and particular education do so vary, and they are so easie to be kept from our knowledge, that the characters of mans heart, blotted and confounded as they are, with dissembling, lying, counterfeiting, and erronious doctrines, are legible onely to him that searcheth hearts” (*Lev*, Introduction, p. 83). Individual behaviour is not predictable because each individual’s heart—the source of vital motion—is shaped and hidden by a complex network of causes. The impossibility of predicting individual behaviour is not only related to the nature of the human heart, however. It is also linked to the fact that the objects of desire are potentially infinite. In the final instance, the vast majority of pleasures and pains are not natural phenomena but matters of taste. Hobbes remarked:

> Of Appetites, and Aversions, some are born with men; as Appetite of food, Appetite of excretion and exoneration, (which may also and more properly be called Aversions, from somewhat they feele in their Bodies:) and some other Appetites, not many. The rest, which are Appetites of particular things, proceed from Experience, and triall of their effect upon themselves, or other men. For of things wee know not at all, or believe not to be, we can have no further Desire, than to tast and try. (*Lev*, I, VI, pp. 119-120)

Hobbes argued that given the hidden nature of the human heart and the fact that pleasure and pain are, for the most part, matters of taste, if political philosophy had to rely on discovering the particular objects that individuals desire, it would be an impossible science. There are no appetites and aversions that are naturally common to all individuals. And the plurality of the
objects of desire ensures that "there is no such *Finis ultimus*, (utmost ayme,) nor *Sumnum Bonum*, (greatest Good,) as is spoken of in the Books of the old Morall Philosophers" (*Lev*, I, XI, p. 160). Instead, there are as many greatest goods as there are individuals. Any political philosophy built around utmost aims or greatest goods is nothing but an absurd fiction. The problems of politics cannot be solved by positing an objective entity that, in spite of ourselves, we do, or at least should desire. A true political science must abandon any such objective notions of the good and seek a new way to conceptualize the possibility of a peaceful political order; the true starting point of political science must be an investigation of the implications of the plurality of the objects of human desire.

The plurality of the objects of desire is a political problem because an individual's opinions about pleasure and pain are at the root of her opinions about the most serious political concerns. At the most profound level, Hobbes argued, judgements about pleasure and pain are judgements about good and evil. Hobbes explained:

> But whatsoever is the object of any mans Appetite or Desire; that is, which he for his part calleth Good: And the object of his Hate, and Aversion, Evill ... . For these words of Good and Evill ... are ever used with relation to the person that useth them: There being nothing simply and absolutely so; nor any common Rule of Good and Evill, to be taken from the nature of the objects themselves ... . (*Lev*, I, VI, p. 120)

The meaning of the words "good" and "evil" are always embedded in one's judgements about pleasure and pain, and this effect is not limited to the words "good" and "evil". Hobbes remarked, "The names of such things as affect us, that is, which please, and displease us, because all men be not alike affected with the same thing, nor the same man at all times ... are ... of inconstant signification" (*Lev*, I, IV, p. 109). The signification of the names of things that affect us—amongst which Hobbes included wisdom, fear, cruelty, and justice—is forever shifting according to who is speaking and when the individual is speaking, because this signification is always affected by, "a tincture of our different passions" (*Lev*, I, IV, p. 109).¹ Arguments about good and evil, the just and the unjust, are nothing more than

---

¹Among the implications of this inconstant signification Hobbes included the fact that, "such names can never be true grounds of any ratiocination. No more can Metaphors, and Tropes of speech: but
arguments about what I like and what I hate, and such arguments can never reach a rational resolution; in these matters there is no truth other than the truth of what I desire. Hobbes pushed this claim to its utmost and argued that individuals’ attitudes toward even the most self-evident of truths—those of geometry—are, in the final instance, determined by the self-interested pursuit of pleasure and avoidance of pain. Hobbes, perhaps thinking of Galileo, claimed that all individuals proclaim geometry to be true because “men care not, in that subject what be truth, as a thing that concerns no mans ambition, profit, or lust”, and concluded:

For I doubt not, but if it had been a thing contrary to any mans right of dominion, or to the interests of men that have dominion, That the three Angles of a Triangle should be equal to two Angles of a Square; that doctrine should have been, if not disputed, yet by the burning of all books of Geometry, suppressed, as farre as he whom it concerned was able. (Lev, I, XI, p. 166)

The impotence of objectivity and the structure of desire conspire together to ensure that, politically speaking, truth, like objectivity, is impotent. Our desires shape the language we use and determine what we will accept as the truth; any doctrine that threatens an individual’s self-interest will be disputed and, if seemingly indisputable, censored and suppressed. It is this relation between individual self-interest and truth that renders the human community fragile and, Hobbes insisted, never far from disintegrating into conflict and civil war.

There are, however, certain insects, such as bees and ants, who, unlike humans, share natural bonds and are able to form stable and ordered societies. Bees and ants are social by nature and the bonds that unite these social insects are bonds of instinct. With social insects there is a natural harmony of desire; individual insects know their place within the community as a whole, and the desires of each are synchronized with the community as a whole. With humans, on the other hand, there is no such natural harmony. In terms of nature, each human individual is an atom, constructing its own world around its own pleasures and these are less dangerous, because they profess their inconstancy; which the other do not” (Lev, I, XIV, pp. 109-110).
Chapter 2: Authorizing Power

pains. As such, a human community is not a natural phenomenon, but is instead an artificial assemblage of atoms. Hobbes expressed the difference between social insects and humans by claiming that “the agreement of these creatures [bees and ants] is Naturall; that of men, is by Covenant only, which is Artificial” (Lev, II, XVII, p. 226). Whereas a community of social insects grows out of the nature of instinct, a human community only exists if and when each atom wills it to exist. Because of the impotence of objectivity and of truth, a human community can only come to be when its members form a covenant that represents their agreement to exist within a single community. Each individual atom must implicitly or explicitly declare its willingness to accept the terms of the covenant and to act accordingly. Only such an agreement will allow humans to mimic bees and ants by bringing about artificially what the bees and ants accomplish naturally. But because they have no grounding in nature, human covenants are always fragile. These covenants are very easy to interpret (or misinterpret) according to one’s own pleasures and pains and too easy to transgress when the terms of the covenant appear to restrict the motion of desire. Hobbes’s political science was an attempt to construct the most stable of all human communities. Hobbes did not believe that human nature could be altered and, as a result, his vision of a community was that of a collection of atoms. In this sense, the community proposed by Hobbes was not essentially different than any other human community throughout history. The difference between Hobbes’s community and others was that Hobbes claimed that his account of the dynamics of human motion had allowed him to discover the true nature of obligation and authority and thereby to show how a meaningful and lasting bond between individual atoms could be created.

Obligation is perhaps the most crucial dimension of Hobbes’s political project because Hobbes believed that obligation, if properly understood, could act as a replacement for objectivity and truth. The function of Hobbes’s obligation was to transform our attitudes about power. According to Hobbes, power is, at its roots, nothing more than the ability to direct the motion of others. But this means that power, in and of itself, necessarily generates
resistance, because to be subjected to power is to be threatened with the inability to pursue one’s own pleasure and avoid one’s own pain. Obligation, Hobbes argued, is the only way to overcome this pairing of power and resistance. To be obliged is the have, at the very least, a duty and, at the very best, a willingness to submit to power. In other words, when obliged, an individual does not submit to power because it represents a superior force because of a sense of duty. Hobbes’s discussion of the structure of obligation was, however, somewhat surprising in that he argued that obligation is created only when an individual agrees to “lay down a right”, either by renouncing or by transferring that right to another. Hobbes claimed that “when a man hath ... abandoned, or granted away his Right; then he is said to be OBLIGED, or BOUND, not to hinder those, to who such a Right is granted, or abandoned, from the benefit of it: and that he Ought, and it is his DUTY, not to make voyd that voluntary act of his own” (Lev, I, XIV, p. 191). Because an individual is obliged only by their own actions and promises or, as Hobbes put it, “there being no Obligation on any man, which ariseth not from some Act of his own” (Lev, II, XXI, p. 268), obligation is not something that can be imposed on individuals. Hobbes offered his most direct analysis of this point in a discussion of conquest. In and of itself, victory in war does not give rise to obligation. At most, victory in war creates masters and slaves and, Hobbes insisted, slaves “have no obligation at all; but may break their bonds, or the prison; and kill ... their master, justly” (Lev, II, XX, p. 255). “Conquest,” Hobbes explained, “is not the Victory it self; but the acquisition by Victory, of a Right, over the persons of men. He therefore that is slain, is Overcome, but not Conquered: He that is taken, and put into prison, or chains, is not Conquered, though Overcome; ... But he that upon promise of Obediance, hath his Life and Liberty allowed him, is then Conquered, and a Subject” (Lev, A Review, and Conclusion, p. 720). It is only once an individual has, through a promise, transferred his rights and, in exchange, has received life and liberty that he has placed himself in a position of obligation to a conqueror.² And this

²Foucault put forward the interesting claim that Hobbes’s discussion of conquest was, in part, an attempt to render conquest politically irrelevant. “Conquest,” Foucault claimed, “is the invisible
promise is binding even if it has been obtained at the point of death—"Feare and Liberty are consistent" (Lev, II, XXI, p. 262). But, although Hobbes argued that a promise of obligation obtained at the point of death is ethically binding, he did not consider it a practical, stable foundation for a body politic. An obligation born at the point of a sword is a grudging obligation. While Hobbes insisted that such obligation is, strictly speaking, the result of a rational decision (a promise of submission in exchange for life is always, according to Hobbes, a rational decision), it is not an obligation born of persuasion. And for Hobbes, only an obligation born of persuasion is strong enough to sustain a truly peaceful commonwealth.  

adversary of the Leviathan” (DS, p. 85). Foucault noted that during the English Civil War each side invoked the legitimacy or the illegitimacy of 1066 to support their cause. These appeals to 1066 by each side were taken by Hobbes as proof that the fact of conquest can never settle political disputes. But, Foucault argued, Hobbes also understood that even if they could settle nothing, the appeals to 1066 had enormous rhetorical power, and Hobbes wanted to find a way to defuse this power. To do so Hobbes used his notion of obligation. Foucault wrote that Hobbes’s notion of obligation effectively said, “war or no war, defeat or not, conquest or agreement, it is the same thing: ‘You have willed it. It is you, the subjects, who have constituted the sovereignty that represents you. We will therefore no longer be bored by your historical revisions: at the end of conquest ... you will once again find contract, the realized will of the subjects’” (DS, p. 85).

3A.E. Taylor argued that Hobbes’s ethical theory was distinct from Hobbes’s “egoistic psychology”. “There are really two distinct questions before Hobbes,” wrote Taylor, “the question why I ought to behave as a good citizen, and the question what inducement can be given to me to do so if my knowledge of the obligation to do so is not itself sufficiently effective” (A.E. Taylor, “The Taylor Thesis” in K.C. Brown, ed. Hobbes Studies. p. 36). Taylor claimed that Hobbes’s ethical theory was a “very strict deontology” that had no “logically necessary connection” with an individual’s self-interest (ibid. p. 37). Taylor, however, somewhat undermined his own claim by arguing that what obliges me to be a good citizen is that I have “pledged my word to be one, and to violate my word, to refuse ‘to perform my covenant as made’, is iniquity, malum in se” (ibid. p. 37). It is precisely the act of pledging or promising that unites Hobbes’s ethical theory and his “egoistic psychology”. First, all promises are born of self-interest. Secondly, even if all promises create an ethical obligation, all promises do not create an ethical obligation of the same strength, and herein lies the importance of Hobbes’s discussion of conquest. Even if a promise made when facing the sword of a conqueror and a promise made after consideration and reflection have the same theoretical status, they do not, and cannot, have the same effect upon human behaviour. Given the nature of human motion, a promise coerced by the sword (i.e., a promise made to avoid pain) will always be less effective than a promise that the individual makes because convinced that the promise is the most effective way of promoting the pursuit of pleasure. Thus, though Hobbes does at times advance legalistic and deontological arguments about obligation (i.e., ‘a promise is a promise’), and even if Hobbes’s ethical theory is deontological, for Hobbes such arguments are too idealistic to be depended upon. What concerns Hobbes is not a theory of ethics but the elaboration of a practice of ethics that can provide his best possible commonwealth with a strong ethical foundation. The question of “inducement”, then, is not really distinct from the question of why I ought to behave as a good citizen. In fact, for Hobbes the
In outlining the importance of persuasion in the construction of a stable commonwealth, Hobbes engaged in a detailed description of the nature of political action. In this description Hobbes focused on the word “person”. This word, Hobbes remarked, derives from the Greek word for face and a Latin word signifying the masks worn by actors when appearing on stage. Hobbes accepted this definition and concluded, “So that a Person, is the same that an Actor is, both on Stage and in common Conversation; and to Personate, is to Act” (Lev, I, XVI, p. 217). Hobbes used this definition of a person and personation to compare each individual atom to an actor on the political stage. Politics occurs when individual persons become actors in the same drama. However, Hobbes added a strange twist to the analogy between theatre and politics. On the stage actors are limited to what the author of the drama has constructed, but in politics actors must become the authors of their own drama. As political actors, individuals become the authors of political entities—which Hobbes called “artificial persons”—that represent the individuals who are their authors. In this way, it is individual actors, as the “authors” of the artificial persons that represent them, who grant these artificial persons authority. Politics occurs when individual actors become the authors of artificial persons who act on their behalf, and authority is nothing more than the political actors’ “Right of doing any Action” (Lev, I, XVI, p. 218) that they have been authorized to carry out. Like obligation, authority derives from the individuals who are the subjects of authority: authority is not something which emanates from any divine or metaphysical force, but from the decision of individual actors to become authors. A body politic and the authority of political actors can never be anything but the consequence of the decisions of individuals to become the authors of their representatives, a point Hobbes drove home when he wrote:

And because the Multitude naturally is not One, but Many; they cannot be understood for one; but many Authors, of every thing their Representative faith, or doth in their question of inducement is the only meaningful question, because only a promise that promotes the pursuit of pleasure can create an ethical practice strong enough to ground a peaceful commonwealth.
Chapter 2: Authorizing Power

Every man giving their common Representative, Authority from himself in particular. (Leviathan VI: pp. 220-221)

Authority, then, is a diffuse entity, only sustained by the ongoing authorship of a multitude of individuals. In his discussion of authority, and in his analogy between the theatre and politics, Hobbes added an important nuance to the connection between obligation and persuasion. Just as obligation in the absence of persuasion is forever weak, authority in the absence of a feeling of authorship is likewise weak. As the case with obligation, the problem of politics, then, is not really a problem of the absence of obligation and authority. Indeed, somewhat paradoxically, Hobbes implied that the problem is one of too much authority and obligation. In everyday life, we authorize and oblige powers and authorities to serve our own interests, and we resist and withdraw from them when they appear to run counter to our interests. There is too much authority and obligation because they are granted willy-nilly, according to the fickle tastes of pleasures and pains. Also, because there is an immense plurality of desires, there is usually a number of different authorities within a given community. These different authorities are organized and resist each other. In everyday life, we authorize and obligate ourselves to them because of the pursuit of pleasure and the avoidance of pain.

Obligation and authority are created and recreated every day. In the most dire of circumstances — civil war, revolution — individuals come to understand their role in the construction of authorities. Hobbes's political theory was an important counterpoint to the idea of a diffuse entity. Authority, then, is a diffuse entity, only sustained by the ongoing authorship of a multitude of individuals. In his discussion of authority, and in his analogy between the theatre and politics, Hobbes added an important nuance to the connection between obligation and persuasion. Just as obligation in the absence of persuasion is forever weak, authority in the absence of a feeling of authorship is likewise weak. As the case with obligation, the problem of politics, then, is not really a problem of the absence of obligation and authority. Indeed, somewhat paradoxically, Hobbes implied that the problem is one of too much authority and obligation. In everyday life, we authorize and oblige powers and authorities to serve our own interests, and we resist and withdraw from them when they appear to run counter to our interests. There is too much authority and obligation because they are granted willy-nilly, according to the fickle tastes of pleasures and pains. Also, because there is an immense plurality of desires, there is usually a number of different authorities within a given community. These different authorities are organized and resist each other. In everyday life, we authorize and obligate ourselves to them because of the pursuit of pleasure and the avoidance of pain.

Obligation and authority are created and recreated every day. In the most dire of circumstances — civil war, revolution — individuals come to understand their role in the construction of authorities. Hobbes's political theory was an important counterpoint to the idea of a diffuse entity. Authority, then, is a diffuse entity, only sustained by the ongoing authorship of a multitude of individuals. In his discussion of authority, and in his analogy between the theatre and politics, Hobbes added an important nuance to the connection between obligation and persuasion. Just as obligation in the absence of persuasion is forever weak, authority in the absence of a feeling of authorship is likewise weak. As the case with obligation, the problem of politics, then, is not really a problem of the absence of obligation and authority. Indeed, somewhat paradoxically, Hobbes implied that the problem is one of too much authority and obligation. In everyday life, we authorize and oblige powers and authorities to serve our own interests, and we resist and withdraw from them when they appear to run counter to our interests. There is too much authority and obligation because they are granted willy-nilly, according to the fickle tastes of pleasures and pains. Also, because there is an immense plurality of desires, there is usually a number of different authorities within a given community. These different authorities are organized and resist each other. In everyday life, we authorize and obligate ourselves to them because of the pursuit of pleasure and the avoidance of pain.

Obligation and authority are created and recreated every day. In the most dire of circumstances — civil war, revolution — individuals come to understand their role in the construction of authorities. Hobbes's political theory was an important counterpoint to the idea of a diffuse entity. Authority, then, is a diffuse entity, only sustained by the ongoing authorship of a multitude of individuals. In his discussion of authority, and in his analogy between the theatre and politics, Hobbes added an important nuance to the connection between obligation and persuasion. Just as obligation in the absence of persuasion is forever weak, authority in the absence of a feeling of authorship is likewise weak. As the case with obligation, the problem of politics, then, is not really a problem of the absence of obligation and authority. Indeed, somewhat paradoxically, Hobbes implied that the problem is one of too much authority and obligation. In everyday life, we authorize and oblige powers and authorities to serve our own interests, and we resist and withdraw from them when they appear to run counter to our interests. There is too much authority and obligation because they are granted willy-nilly, according to the fickle tastes of pleasures and pains. Also, because there is an immense plurality of desires, there is usually a number of different authorities within a given community. These different authorities are organized and resist each other. In everyday life, we authorize and obligate ourselves to them because of the pursuit of pleasure and the avoidance of pain.

Obligation and authority are created and recreated every day. In the most dire of circumstances — civil war, revolution — individuals come to understand their role in the construction of authorities. Hobbes's political theory was an important counterpoint to the idea of a diffuse entity. Authority, then, is a diffuse entity, only sustained by the ongoing authorship of a multitude of individuals. In his discussion of authority, and in his analogy between the theatre and politics, Hobbes added an important nuance to the connection between obligation and persuasion. Just as obligation in the absence of persuasion is forever weak, authority in the absence of a feeling of authorship is likewise weak. As the case with obligation, the problem of politics, then, is not really a problem of the absence of obligation and authority. Indeed, somewhat paradoxically, Hobbes implied that the problem is one of too much authority and obligation. In everyday life, we authorize and oblige powers and authorities to serve our own interests, and we resist and withdraw from them when they appear to run counter to our interests. There is too much authority and obligation because they are granted willy-nilly, according to the fickle tastes of pleasures and pains. Also, because there is an immense plurality of desires, there is usually a number of different authorities within a given community. These different authorities are organized and resist each other. In everyday life, we authorize and obligate ourselves to them because of the pursuit of pleasure and the avoidance of pain.

Obligation and authority are created and recreated every day. In the most dire of circumstances — civil war, revolution — individuals come to understand their role in the construction of authorities. Hobbes's political theory was an important counterpoint to the idea of a diffuse entity. Authority, then, is a diffuse entity, only sustained by the ongoing authorship of a multitude of individuals. In his discussion of authority, and in his analogy between the theatre and politics, Hobbes added an important nuance to the connection between obligation and persuasion. Just as obligation in the absence of persuasion is forever weak, authority in the absence of a feeling of authorship is likewise weak. As the case with obligation, the problem of politics, then, is not really a problem of the absence of obligation and authority. Indeed, somewhat paradoxically, Hobbes implied that the problem is one of too much authority and obligation. In everyday life, we authorize and oblige powers and authorities to serve our own interests, and we resist and withdraw from them when they appear to run counter to our interests. There is too much authority and obligation because they are granted willy-nilly, according to the fickle tastes of pleasures and pains. Also, because there is an immense plurality of desires, there is usually a number of different authorities within a given community. These different authorities are organized and resist each other. In everyday life, we authorize and obligate ourselves to them because of the pursuit of pleasure and the avoidance of pain.
an attempt to explode the normal processes of authorization and obligation by highlighting their destructive consequences. To do so, Hobbes engaged in his most famous thought-experiment. Hobbes imagined human beings in the state of nature—"the time men live without a common Power to keep them all in awe" (Lev, I, XIII, p. 185)—to illustrate how following desire unconsciously and instinctively means that the underlying dynamic of human relations will remain one of war and violent death. Hobbes argued that until and unless individuals can see this clearly, the process of authorization and promises of obligation will never give birth to a sovereign capable of solidifying and perpetuating a peaceful commonwealth.

THE STATE OF NATURE
In Chapter XIII of the Leviathan—"Of the Natural Condition of Mankind, as concerning their Felicity, and Misery"—Hobbes made his most forceful effort to persuade us about why government is necessary and to intimate what sort of common representative we should authorize. In this chapter, Hobbes reflected about what occurs in the "natural condition" of humanity—usually referred to as the state of nature. The remarkable feature of this chapter is that although it appears to describe human history (or prehistory), it is a simple but powerful thought-experiment. Hobbes connected the state of nature and history only insofar as he used certain historical situations as the basis for logical inference: he wrote, for example, "it may be perceived what manner of life there would be, were there were no common Power to fear; by the manner of life, which men have formerly lived under a peaceful government, use to degenerate into, in a civil Warre" (Lev, I, XIII, p. 187). Also, Hobbes did not attempt to focus on individuals, but on humanity in general. Hobbes's description of the state of nature, then, is an outline of the logical implications of unrestrained human desire, describing what would occur if we could ever reach the historically impossible situation wherein "everything is permitted". The state of nature is a thought-experiment that, by abstracting from political history and the peculiarities of individuals, served to reveal the most basic dynamics of human relations by stripping away all the pretences, opinions, and security that enable us to
avoid coming face to face with the harsh truth about the underlying structure of human relationships.

In attempting to use the state of nature to explore the dynamics of human relations, even though the state of nature is an a-historical and abstract thought-experiment, Hobbes is writing for, and about us.4 The sense that the state of nature is about is heightened by Hobbes’s use of present tense to describe the state of nature: “From this equality of ability, ariseth equality of hope in the attaining of our Ends”, or, “For every man looketh that his companions should value him, at the same rate he sets upon himself”. While the state of nature itself might not be a historical reality, the passions and desires revealed by Hobbes’s thought-experiment are all too real. Hobbes insisted that a ruthless honesty about ourselves, as well as an attempt to move beyond our own world of pleasures and pains, are necessary if we are to grasp the implications of his claims. In describing the natural state of humanity Hobbes attempted to capture something universal; he attempted to capture the lengths each of us will go to, regardless of our own particular objects of desire, in the pursuit of pleasure and avoidance of pain. Even though individuals are atoms moved by different objects of pleasure and pain, each individual atom responds to the general stimuli of pleasure and pain in the same patterned fashion. In the introduction of the Leviathan, Hobbes claimed that because of:

the similitude of the thoughts, and Passions of one man, to the thoughts, and Passions of another, whosoever looketh into himself, and considereth what he doth, when he does think, opine, reason, hope, feare, &c, and upon what grounds: he shall thereby read and know, what are the thoughts, and Passions of all other men, upon the like

---

4In this respect C.B. Macpherson made the important claim that Hobbes’s state of nature is not concerned with “natural” but “civilized” individuals. Macpherson wrote: “The fact that the state of nature is a logical and not an historical hypothesis is generally understood, and it would scarcely have required attention here had it not apparently led sometimes to a false inference. It seems often to be assumed that since the state of nature was not an historical hypothesis it must have been a logical hypothesis reached by setting aside completely the historically acquired characteristics of men. If it was not about primitive men it must have been about natural as contrasted with civilized men. But this does not follow. ... His state of nature is a statement of the behaviour to which men as they are, men who live in civilized societies, would be led if all law and contract enforcement (i.e. even the present imperfect enforcement) were removed. To get the state of nature, Hobbes set aside law, but not the socially acquired behaviour and desires of men” (C.B. Macpherson. The Political Theory of Possessive Individualism. pp. 21-22).
occasions. ... [W]hen I shall have set down my own reading [of the passions] orderly, and perspicuously, the pains left another, will be only to consider, if he also find not the same in himself. For this kind of Doctrine, admiteth no other Demonstration. (Lev, Introduction, pp. 82-83)

In the thought-experiment of the state of nature Hobbes wanted to draw our attention to the underlying similarity of human motion in all individuals to highlight the destructive consequences it generates. Hobbes’s state of nature was his attempt to demonstrate how and why, even if two individuals love and hate different objects, the general patterns that arise out of the pursuit of pleasure and avoidance of pain will bring these two individuals into conflict. To understand why this is so, we have to move beyond the particular things we desire and attempt to understand the basic dynamics of motion that, because of our common physiology, animate humanity as a whole. Hobbes wanted to use the state of nature to demonstrate that when it comes to understanding the dynamics of human relations, it is not individual tastes that are important but the universal structure of human desire. What Hobbes asked is that each and every individual participate actively, imagine themselves in the contexts and situations he described, be aroused by appetites and made anxious by aversions.

In sum, Hobbes asked the readers of the Leviathan to become self-reflexive and consider whether or not the pursuit of pleasure and avoidance of pain would lead them to engage in the behaviour he describes, and for the reasons he describes.

Hobbes began his description of the state of nature with the assertion that humans are essentially equal. Hobbes did not look to any metaphysical or divine principles to support this assertion. Instead, Hobbes turned to nature:

Nature hath made men so equall, in the faculties of body, and mind; as that though there bee found one man sometimes manifestly stronger in body, or of quicker mind then another; yet when all is reckoned together, the difference between man, and man, is not so considerable, as that one man can thereupon claim to himselfe any benefit, to which another may not pretend, as well as he. For as to the strength of body, the weakest has strength enough to kill the strongest, either by secret machination, of by confederacy with others, that are in the same danger with himself. (Lev, I, XIII, p. 183)\(^1\)

\(^1\)Hobbes was even more blunt in De Cive. “For if we look at men full-grown,” Hobbes wrote, “and consider how brittle the frame of our human body is, (which perishing, all its strength, vigour, and wisdom itself perisheth with it) and how easy a matter it is, even for the weakest man to kill the
Hobbes argued that humans are essentially equal because the differences among humans are not considerable enough to render anyone safe from violent death at the hands of any other. Each individual has the capacity to kill each and every other individual or, to reverse it, each individual faces the possibility of suffering a suffer violent death at the hands of each and every other individual. Hobbesian equality is the equality of the mortal body—a body always strong enough to kill and always weak enough to be killed. And even if this equality has not always been acknowledged conceptually, it has, Hobbes claimed, been acknowledged practically. It is the mortality of the body that ensures there is no natural title to rule and, in this sense, our equal ability to kill and to be killed translates directly into political equality. There is no natural title to rule because any such claim can be challenged by violence, and such challenges, because of the vulnerability of the body, always hold out a chance of success. Hobbes discussed this in relation to the equality of the sexes. Hobbes wrote that “some have attributed the Dominion to the Man only, as being of the more excellent Sex; they misconstrue in it. For there is not always that difference of strength or prudence between the man and the woman, as that the right can be determined without War” (Lev, II, XX, p. 253). The fact that violence is always the ultimate resolution of any political dispute sheds light on why Hobbes focused on persuasion and the promise of obligation as the only meaningful foundation for a community. The overcoming of violence as the final arbiter of political disputes can occur only if and when individuals have been persuaded to oblige themselves to a government whose decision they will recognize as authoritative.\(^6\)

\(^6\)As I will outline later in my thesis, Foucault also focused on the mortality of the body in his understanding of politics. Unlike Hobbes, however, Foucault looked at the mortality of the body as something liberating. For Foucault, the mortality of the body and the equal ability to kill and be killed is the definitive proof that individuals always have the power to shape their political destinies; violence is a permanent alternative by which individuals can overcome a power that has grown burdensome. Whereas Hobbes used the mortality of the body to persuade individuals to construct a strong state, Foucault used the mortality of the body to ask why revolt was so infrequent.
In the thought-experiment of the state of nature Hobbes focused on the implications of the equal ability to kill and be killed, first stripping away all forms of human relations, thereby totally atomizing individuals, and then speculating about how these totally atomized individuals would relate to one another. Hobbes sketched three possible existential attitudes that could be adopted by individuals who, as isolated atoms, are faced with the vulnerability of the body. The first attitude was a feeling of hope. When two individuals believe they are equal, this belief gives rise to an, “equality of hope in the attaining of our Ends. And therefore if any two men desire the same thing, which nevertheless they cannot both enjoy, they become enemies; and in the way to their End ... endeavour to destroy or subdue one an other” (Lev, I, XIII, p. 184). Natural equality leads to violence spawned by the hope that we can attain what we desire by killing or subduing those who stand in our way. The second attitude outlined by Hobbes was a feeling of vulnerability. When an individual focuses on the vulnerability of his own body, this inspires a fear that he is always on the cusp of losing what he has acquired, even his life. This insecurity, like the hope that inspires competition, results in violence because this feeling of vulnerability causes an individual to launch preemptive strikes in the attempt “to master the persons of all men he can, so long, till he see no other power great enough to endanger him” (Lev, I, XIII, p. 184). The third attitude explored by Hobbes was a desire for glory and honour. Equality means that “every man looketh that his companion should value him, at the same rate he sets upon himselfe” (Lev, I, XIII, p. 185), and when others fail to acknowledge one’s worth, one will “naturally endeavour, as far as he dares (which amongst them that have not common power, to keep them in quiet, is far enough to make them destroy each other,) to extort a greater value from his contemners, by dommage” (Lev, I, XIII, p. 185). Once again, violence is the response to our natural equality. That all three attitudes result in violence, albeit for very different reasons, led Hobbes to conclude that the state of nature can only be a state of war, a war wherein “every man is Enemy to every man” (Lev, I, XIII, p. 186). The definitive feature of such a war is that, unlike all other forms of war, whether international or civil, there can be no hope of victory.
Hobbes explained: "But it [war in the state of nature] is perpetual in its own nature, because in regard of the equality of those that strive, it cannot be ended by victory; for in this state the conqueror is subject to so much danger, as it were to be accounted a miracle, if any, even the most strong, should close up his life with many years, and old age" (Civ, I, I, §13, p. 29). Hobbes insisted that, when extended to its logical extreme natural equality is the feature of human life that most effectively guarantees that in the state of nature our pursuit of desire is destined to end in violent death at the hands of others.

This portrait of the war of all against all in the state of nature, like the state of nature itself, is not to be taken as a historical reality. Hobbes’s intention was to offer a model that, by pushing things to their logical extreme, could shed light on what is really occurring between humans in everyday life. In everyday life, each individual pursues power, acting either out of a competitive drive, a fear of others, or a desire to force others to recognize one’s value. The image of life as a race for power I depicted in Chapter 1 might be an accurate description of everyday life but, Hobbes implied, it is a less truthful description than the image of a war of all against all. The image of the race is accurate because it presents the competition for power as restrained by certain rules and limits; in everyday life, the competition for power does not resemble Hobbes’s nightmarish war of all against all. But the image of the war of all against all is more truthful than the image of a race because it serves to reveal the most profound consequences of the competition for power: even if the competition for power does not actually degenerate into a nightmarish war, this competition does divide and isolate individuals to such an extent that each individual becomes an isolated atom. No individual can rely on any other individual; others must be viewed as objects to be used and, eventually, obstacles to be overcome. The competition for power thus parallels the state of nature because this competition serves to prevent and erode meaningful bonds with others. Hobbes, in his description of the state of nature, argued that if we are honest with ourselves, we know this to be the case:
Let him therefore consider with himselfe, when taking a journey, he armes himselfe, and seeks to go well accompanied; when going to sleep, he locks his dores; when even in his house he locks his chests; and this when he knows there bee Lawes, and publike Officers, armed, to revenge all injuries shall be done him; what opinion he has of his fellow subject when he rides armed; of his fellow Citizens, when he locke his dores; and of his children, and servants, when he locks his chests. Does he not there as much accuse mankind by his actions, as I do by my words? (Lev. I, XIII, pp. 186-187)

Our everyday actions, Hobbes suggested, betray a mistrust of the other, and a mistrust so profound it exists even though we know there are laws designed to protect us, and police and soldiers commissioned to enforce these laws. This mistrust extends first to the strangers we might meet in the middle of nowhere, far away from the immediate protection of the police. But this mistrust is not limited to strangers. It extends to people who are familiar but unknown—those who live in the same city but who might break into our house. From the familiar and unknown, and most damning, this mistrust also reaches into the family—the most natural of human bonds—and makes itself felt in actions toward servants, children, and spouses. Everyday life thus mimics the state of nature insofar as the competition for power always threatens to replace bonds of familiarity and trust with naked relations of power. The state of nature is Hobbes’s attempt to prove that the underlying effect of the competition for power in everyday life is the atomization of individuals, and the building of human relations that are structured by hostility and conflict, born of the hope of outdoing others and the fear of being outdone by others.

The intention of the thought-experiment of the state of nature is to tighten, highlight, and allow us to conceptualize the fear we feel everyday when in the presence of others. The state of nature strips away all pretence, showing that underneath it all human relations are relations of mutual mistrust amongst individuals who pursue pleasure and avoid pain. The state of nature is an attempt to prove that desire—the pursuit of pleasure and the avoidance of pain—ensures that power either drives, or pushes us forward.\(^7\)

\(^7\)C.B. Macpherson draws attention to the fact that Hobbes’s description of the struggle for power does not depend on an assertion that humans have an innate desire for power. Macpherson first quotes Hobbes’s claim that the reason individuals strive to acquire power, “is not always that a man hopes for a more intensive delight, that he has already attained to; or that he cannot be content with a
**Chapter 2: Authorizing Power**

POWER of a Man, (to take it Universally,) is his present means, to obtain some future apparent Good” (Lev, I, X, p. 150), and the effort to obtain “some future apparent Good” always takes place in the presence of other human beings. We want to use power to repel others, or to gain authority over others in an effort to amplify our own power. The potency of Hobbes’s description of the state of nature is that it allows him to argue that atomism and the mistrust of others grow out of human nature; or, to put it another way, these consequences are situated within human physiology and the mechanics of desire. The insecurity, the anxiety, the isolation, and the violence associated with desire do not depend on any particular object of human desire but on the very structure of desire. Even if each and every individual had their own exclusive object of desire, the taste of which gave no one else pleasure, human relations would still be characterized by struggles for power. This differentiates Hobbes from a great many theorists who implicitly or explicitly link human conflict to scarcity, or the absence of human conflict to abundance. For Hobbes, conflict is built into the structure of desire and, while external factors like scarcity may facilitate and exacerbate conflict, they are never to be held solely responsible. Hobbes claimed that desire brings us into contact with our fellow human beings, but desire also guarantees that when human relationships are not regulated by a properly constructed political power, they are relations of mutual mistrust that, not far below the surface, are relations of violence.

---

Moderate power: but because he cannot assure the power and means to live well, which he hath present, without the acquisition of more” (Lev, XI, p. 161). Macpherson continued: “Every man’s innate desires are indeed incessant, but not every man’s are for an increased level of satisfactions or power. All men in society (and in the hypothetical state of nature) do seek ever more power, but not because they all have an innate desire for it. The innately moderate man in society must seek more power simply to protect his present level. And Hobbes’s conclusion that all of them must so act implies that the social arrangements are such as to permit every man’s natural powers to be invaded by others: if there were any customary protection of individual’s livings, or customary limitations of their competitive activities, at any ranks, not all of them would have to, or not all of them would be able to, enter the contest for more power” (C.B. Macpherson. *The Political Theory of Possessive Individualism*, pp. 41-42). Whenever a government fails to provide an adequate guarantee about the future (and for Hobbes all governments that fall short of his own Leviathan are guilty of such failure), individuals will naturally begin to mistrust one another and therefore be driven to acquire ever more power.
Hobbes wanted to use this clarification of the underlying dynamics of human desire as the point of departure for the construction of a truly peaceful commonwealth. Bringing the consequences of desire to the level of self-consciousness was, Hobbes believed, the beginning of our political education. The state of nature teaches us that when merely instinctual, the pursuit of desire is untenable. The instinctual pursuit of desire is counter-productive because it slowly isolates the individual and fragments the community. Hobbes wanted to make this fact absolutely clear to force the individual into a process of self-transformation. The transformation Hobbes wanted to spark was not an alteration of the dynamics of desire, which, because these dynamics are a product of our physiology, would be impossible. What Hobbes wanted to do was transform the horizon of desire. Desire, when instinctual, has a very narrow range of vision: it is directed toward particular objects and mobilizes reason in the pursuit of these objects. It is this narrow range of vision that keeps us from seeing the necessary consequences of desire—civil war, struggles for power, violence, anxiety. And, Hobbes insisted, the consequences of desire are absolutely necessary: "The true and only reason why a man thinks that human affairs are ruled by chance is this: he does not know their integral and necessary causes." "Hence," Hobbes continued, "all results are necessary because of their causes; consequently they seem fortuitous for no reason other than this: that we do not perceive all their causes" (DM, p. 460). But once we perceive the necessity of the consequences of desire we can begin the project of altering the horizon of desire. This project consists of disciplining desire such that our pursuit of desire is no longer something that atomizes individuals and destabilizes the community but something that binds individuals together. For Hobbes, this process of discipline must begin with the individual. The individual must be persuaded about the inevitable consequences of the instinctual pursuit of desire; but this process cannot end with the individual. The individual must understand that government is the only way to truly discipline desire. Because of the dynamics of human nature and desire, Hobbes concluded that individuals can never be totally self-regulating. It is far too easy, when desire grows intense, to forget the lessons of the state of nature, just as it is
all too easy, when political ambitions grow strong, to forget the lessons of civil war. The process of disciplining desire can only be completed by the authorization of a sovereign strong enough to ensure that, when the lessons of the state of nature are forgotten by individuals—and these lessons will be forgotten—there will be a power strong enough to prevent the individual from eroding the community as a whole. Humans can only be self-regulating if and when they become political actors who authorize, and thereby oblige themselves to, a body politic that is able to use force to remind them about the truth of human nature.

The isolation, anxiety, fear, and violence that arise out of the instinctive pursuit of desire are the starting point of Hobbes’s description of what politics should be. Hobbes claimed to have offered his readers the first true account of human nature, and this account allowed him to offer the first true science of politics. Politics is the art of self-discipline in and through the creation of an artificial person that will regulate the motion of desire. Politics, then, does not grow directly out of human nature, but instead grows out of the limitation of human nature—the fact that there is no natural bond that can unite individuals within a stable community. But even though political life is in this respect unnatural (or artificial), it does not turn against human nature in an act of repression. Politics can be both unnatural and non-repressive because politics does not represent the death of desire but the means by which we become able to satisfy desire effectively. In other words, Hobbes promised that to discipline desire in and though the creation of government does not represent any sort of loss. Instead, as the actors and the authors of our own political destinies, we actually gain when we undertake the self-discipline required by government. Not only do we gain by becoming able to satisfy desire without being isolated, but we gain control over our own world. Hobbes opened his *Leviathan* with a powerful image that represented this promise:

Nature (the Art whereby God hath made and governs the World) is by the *Art* of man, as in many other things, so in this also imitated, that it can make an Artificial Animal.
Government allows us to gain control over our world because through government we become free of what we naturally are. By nature, our physiology prevents us from living together peacefully. The original, natural act of creation was flawed to the extent that humans, unlike certain other insects and animals, are not naturally social. Humans must take it upon themselves to remedy this flaw by imitating the original act of creation and constructing a state—an “Artificial Animal”—that can regulate the dynamics of desire and thus overcome the limitation of human nature.

THE GROUNDS OF POLITICAL POWER

The individual pursuit of power and the application of political power overlap, but they are not congruent; there are gaps between the two, and these gaps represent potential sources of resistance. In the name of their desires, individuals will be tempted to resist the application of political power if and when political power appears to hamper their pursuit of these desires. The goal of political power is to counter the disruptions and the destabilization caused by the pursuit of desire. When presented in these terms, Hobbes's idea of politics might be viewed as either a permanent stalemate between the individual and political power, or a version of a totalitarian power that, in order to protect the community, must penetrate and control all dimensions of life. Hobbes, however, believed that his image of the state of nature could be used to generate another alternative through the education of desire. The story of the state of nature teaches us that we should desire a strong government, that the horizon of desire must be expanded to include the desire to build a strong and peaceful community. The peaceful commonwealth, then, is populated by individuals who have been persuaded about the necessity of government. This persuasion, however, is not enough. At times, individuals can and will have their rational understanding of the necessity of government overpowered by intense desires. But the individual who, in a specific situation at a given time, forgets the
Chapter 2: Authorizing Power

lessons of the state of nature, is not an enemy of the community. Such an individual, Hobbes implied, can be very easily led back to the true path by the mere threat of political sanctions, or, if threats fail to work, by the actual application of political sanctions. The true enemy of the community is instead the individual who remains unpersuaded by Hobbes’s story of the state of nature. The unpersuaded individual, Hobbes argued, represents a permanent point of instability within the commonwealth. The unpersuaded individual feels no obligation toward the sovereign and therefore does not obey the laws that have been established to keep the peace; the unpersuaded individual, unlike the individual whose desires have eclipsed the lessons of the state of nature, will continually and habitually violate the law. And continual and habitual violations of the law undermine peace because they cause fear and mistrust to spread throughout the community. In his political science Hobbes not only had to attempt to persuade individuals to establish government he also had to outline how to deal with those who were within the bounds of the commonwealth but who remained unpersuaded about the necessity of obliging themselves to the sovereign.

Hobbes called the individual who refused to be persuaded about the truth of the state of nature “the fool”. Hobbes described the reasoning of the fool as follows:

8The fool that Hobbes describes is a version of the Biblical fool: “The fool says in his heart, ‘There is no God.’ They are corrupt, they do abominable deeds, there is none that does good” (Psalms 14:1). In response to the Biblical fool, St. Anselm developed his famous “ontological proof” of the existence of God. Anselm defined God as “a being than which nothing greater can be conceived” and argued that God must therefore exist because to exist “in reality” is greater that to exist “in the understanding alone” (St. Anselm. Basic Writings, pp. 53-54). Anselm believed his proof powerful enough to lead the fool to recant his denial of God. There is a curious parallel between Anselm’s and Hobbes’s responses to the fool: Anselm was trying to convince the fool of the existence of an invisible and omnipotent power; while Hobbes was trying to convince the fool about the existence of justice. In Hobbes’s presentation, justice is connected to the sovereign’s ability to enforce the civil and natural laws. Hobbes’s sovereign was by necessity a “visible Power” (Lev, II, XVII, p. 223), so Hobbes’s fool, unlike the Biblical fool, did not have to be convinced of the sovereign’s existence, but that the sovereign’s power was great enough to enforce the law. Hobbes claimed the sovereign’s power was “as great, as possibly men can be imagined to make it” (Lev, II, XX, p. 260). Hobbes’s use of the term “imagined” is suggestive. We can imagine an omnipotent sovereign even though we know, thanks to Hobbes, that an omnipotent sovereign cannot exist. In this respect, Hobbes’s response to the fool is similar to Anselm’s ontological proof. Hobbes seemed to want to define the power of the sovereign such that this definition implied the sovereign’s ability to enforce the law and thereby prove the existence of justice.
The Foole hath sayd in his heart, there is no such thing as Justice; and sometimes also with his tongue; seriously alleaging, that every mans conservation, and contentment, being committed to his own care, there could be no reason, why every man might not do what he thought conducd thereunto: and therefore also to make, or not make; keep, or not keep Covenants, was not against Reason, when it conducd to ones benefit. (Lev, I, XV, p. 203)

As this reasoning demonstrates, the fool is a complicated creature. On the one hand, the fool follows Hobbes because the fool does not want to remain in the state of nature; the fool wants the benefits of a secure community. On the other hand, the fool wants to manipulate the rules of a secure community by keeping his promises only when to do so facilitates his narrow self-interest. The fool, then, wants to take advantage of others by playing on their sense of justice. To such an individual Hobbes could only say that by breaking confidence with others, one risks forfeiting the protection of society. A fool only remains a member of the community for as long as others are unaware of the fool’s true intentions and, Hobbes argued, “all men that contribute not to his [the foole’s] destruction, forbear him onely out of ignorance of what is good for themselves” (Lev, I, XV, p. 205). And no one, Hobbes cautioned, should, “reasonably reckon upon” (Lev, I, XV, p. 205) being able to hide their true intentions forever; to do so amounts to a very dangerous wager. To systematically pursue one’s own narrow desires within the midst of the community is to be almost inevitably

---

9Kinch Hoekstra argued that one must distinguish between the “Silent Fool” and the “Explicit Fool” (Kinch Hoekstra, “Hobbes and the Foole” in Political Theory [Vol. 25, # 5/October 1997] p. 623). The silent fool is a fool who believes in his heart there is no such thing as justice but who does not publicly announce this belief. The explicit fool, on the other hand, is an individual who either announces his belief publicly (the “Loud Fool”) or who betrays his beliefs though the habitual commission of crime (the “Flagrant fool”). Hoekstra claimed that Hobbes’s response to the fool was directed only toward the Explicit Fool. Hoekstra’s distinction between Silent and Explicit Fools highlights an important distinction between belief and action. Hobbes’s entire political system is designed to control human behaviour rather than belief. According to Hobbes, while governments had the right to engage in censorship, and while governments should attempt to use institutions like universities to inculcate certain beliefs, governments cannot penetrate an individual’s innermost thoughts. Since governments cannot penetrate an individual’s innermost thoughts, governments cannot guarantee that they have truly shaped an individual’s beliefs. But even if belief cannot be rigorously controlled, behaviour can, and Hobbes’s system of government was designed to give the sovereign the tools to control behaviour. In this respect, Hoekstra’s claim that Hobbes only addresses the Silent Fool is convincing only if the Silent Fool is understood to be an individual who believes there is no such thing as justice but who still behaves in accordance with the law. And in such a case, though an individual may be a hypocrite, it is not clear he is a fool in Hobbes’s sense.
assured of finding oneself in the conditions described in the state of nature—isolated, anxious, and unable to defend oneself. But this argument is not really directed toward the fool himself. Hobbes was instead writing to all “non-fools”—in other words, those who have, with some degree of sincerity, authorized the government that will discipline desire. By invoking the fool, and the inevitability of the fool’s exposure, Hobbes was trying to persuade all non-fools that the body politic they have created will be capable of rooting out all individuals who represent a threat to the security and the happiness of others. Hobbes’s own wager was that, if he had accurately understood human physiology and human psychology, there would be very few fools willing to risk the consequences of being cast out of the community on the basis of a very slim hope of success; the fear of detection and the punishment would, Hobbes reasoned, deter most individuals from following the example of the fool.

As Hobbes’s argument about the fool demonstrates, the peaceful human community is, at least in part, to be held together by the fear of the sovereign. Fear is, according to Hobbes, a complex passion, and a passion not opposed to, but closely linked with reason. Hobbes wrote about fear, and its role in solidifying communal bonds:

It is objected: it is so improbable that men should grow into civil societies out of fear, that if they had been afraid, they would not have endured each other’s looks. They

---

10Hobbes was surely aware that his argument is far from complete. If, and only if, he could prove not only that an individual cannot be reasonably confident of hiding his true intentions forever, but also that punishment would inevitably follow violation of the law, would he have a completely persuasive argument. If the fool was wagering against omnipotence, then the fool would be necessarily doomed to fail. But the fool is wagering against a less-than-omnipotent power, so there is always a chance of a successful (i.e., undetected) crime. This chance of success, and the hope it inspires would seem to be enough to ensure that each and every community will contain its share of fools. In fact, as I will outline in Chapter 5, Bentham would later use the probability of success to develop a measure of the degree of an individual’s “criminal disposition”. Hobbes’s own response to the inevitability of the fool is, I believe, twofold. First, Hobbes seems confident that, even if fools are inevitable, they will always be an insignificant minority and here insignificant means: ‘unable to destabilize the body politic as a whole’. Secondly, Hobbes attempted to protect the community from the fool by building a body politic that approximated omnipotence as closely as possible. In writing about the fool, Hobbes is not simply offering the fool a somewhat unpersuasive argument, but he is also encouraging all non-fools to be vigilant. If all non-fools lend their eyes to the sovereign then the body politic becomes, if not all-powerful, at least all-seeing.
Part 1: Hobbes

presume, I believe, that to fear is nothing else then to be affrighted. I comprehend in this word fear, a certain foresight of future evil; neither do I conceive flight the sole property of fear, but to distrust, suspect, take heed, provide so that they may not fear, is also incident to the fearfull. (Civ, I, I, §2, p. 24)

There are two ways in which Hobbes’s proposed community is sustained by fear. First, there is the fear of isolation and atomism that Hobbes attempted to force individuals to conceptualize through his description of the state of nature. This fear of isolation and atomism was to give rise to a “second birth” of the individual—a second birth that would make peace possible. Our natural birth, unlike that of bees and ants, is not enough to create a peaceful community. Hobbes wrote: “all men, because they are born in infancy, are born unapt for society. Many also (perhaps most men) either through defect of mind, or want of eduction, remain unfit during the whole course of their lives; yet have they, infants as well as those of riper years, a human nature; wherefore man is made fit for society not by nature, but by eduction” (Civ, I, I, §2, pp. 21-22). To be rendered fit for society, individuals must be educated about exactly why they need society, and this education is performed by the thought-experiment of the state of nature. The thought-experiment of the state of nature teaches individuals that a strong government is the only way to harmonize human behaviour and protect themselves from the fools who have remained unpersuaded about the necessity of government. At this point emerges Hobbes’s second fear—the fear of the sovereign. Individuals have been driven by the fear of atomism to understand why they should authorize a strong sovereign; once the sovereign is created, the fear of the sovereign replaces the fear of others that was found in the state of nature. The fear of the sovereign is necessary

11In the state of nature the primary fear is a fear of other individuals. In a well-ordered body politic the primary fear is a fear of the sovereign. In this respect, the move from the state of nature into the commonwealth transforms the primary object of fear and, in so doing, transforms the trajectory of human behaviour. We are no longer primarily motivated to acquire more and more power to defend ourselves from other individuals, but are now primarily motivated to (i) follow the laws to avoid punishment and (ii) pursue pleasure in accordance with the law. Hobbes, then, wants to centralize fear by focusing all individuals (or, more precisely, all individual subjects) on the same object of fear. Hobbes, however, did not think that the fear of other individuals would be completely overcome within his proposed commonwealth, nor did he want this to occur. The fear of others plays a role in stabilizing Hobbes’s sovereign because the fear of others (i.e., the fool) reminds individuals why they should want the sovereign to be as strong as possible.
because the dynamics of desire are rooted in our physiology and psychology; the education provided by the thought-experiment of the state of nature cannot completely remove the impulse toward a narrow pursuit of desire. Knowing this to be the case, we must agree to authorize a sovereign strong enough to make individuals fearful of pursuing desire if and when this pursuit might undermine peace and stability: we must create a sovereign that can scare us straight. In using fear as the foundation of the body politic, Hobbes attempted to harness the fear of the future that, as I outlined in the previous chapter, he claimed was a central feature of human psychology. With the story of the state of nature, Hobbes attempted to replace the absurd tales we use to explain our “good and evill fortune” with a true tale. The state of nature teaches that, given our physiology and psychology, if we do not discipline desire we can only reasonably expect “evill fortune”. We must, therefore, become the authors of a strong sovereign by a promise of obligation. And this promise of obligation, Hobbes suggested, is the only true way to alleviate our natural anxiety about the future. By obliging ourselves to a strong sovereign we now truly understand the causes of “good and evill fortune”: if we live up to our promise of obligation we can reasonably expect to enjoy the good fortune of commodious living; if we fail to live up to our promise of obligation we can reasonably expect to suffer “evill fortune” in the form of punishment at the hand of the sovereign.

THE ETHICS OF POLITICAL POWER

Using the self-knowledge born of fear as his starting point, Hobbes outlined the process by which naturally atomistic individuals become bound to one another through political obligation. Hobbes used the language of natural right and natural law to describe the mechanics of this movement. Natural right is present even in the state of nature, where it gives each individual the right to do anything they think necessary for their survival. We have the natural right to preserve ourselves, and this right extends, “even to one anothers body” (Lev, I, XIV, p. 190). In its purely logical formulation, then, natural right means that everything is permitted in the effort to survive. But while this natural right appears to be
extremely powerful, it is quite meaningless. As Hobbes wrote, “as long as this naturall Right of every man to every thing endureth, there can be no security to any man, (how strong or wise soever he be,) of living out the time, which Nature ordinarily alloweth men to live” (Lev, I, XIV, p. 190). Even though we can claim the natural right to anything and everything, we lack the power to enforce this claim because of our fundamental equality. Political association can only begin if we agree to transfer our natural right to everything in exchange for security. This transfer of natural right, if it is to be a stable foundation for peace, must be done according to the terms of what Hobbes called natural law. The fundamental terms of natural law are (i) “that every man, ought to endeavo-ur Peace, as farre as he has hope of obtaining it” and (ii) “That a man be willing, when others are so too, as farre-forth, as for Peace, and defence of himself he shall think it necessary, to lay down this right to all things; and be contented with so much liberty against other men, as he will allow other men against himselfe” (Lev, I, XIV, p. 190). The regulation of natural law is necessary because it ensures that in agreeing to transfer natural right an individual is not placing himself in a position to be destroyed by others. The promise to transfer our natural right to everything and the promise to act peacefully are only obliging if and when the individual can be assured that everyone else will make and honour similar promises. And, Hobbes argued, such an assurance can only be given when there exists a power capable of enforcing these promises (Lev, I, XV, p. 215). Herein lies the true basis of government. Because by nature we have the right to do anything to preserve ourselves, and because this right is meaningless unless informed by the terms of natural law, when we transfer our natural right to everything we must also oblige ourselves to a government capable of ensuring that each and every individual will honour their promises. Government, then, begins with three overlapping promises: (i) the promise to forgo our natural right to everything, (ii) the promise to abide by the natural law and the terms of peace as long as others do likewise, and (iii) the promise to oblige ourselves to a sovereign capable of making sure we live up to our word.
In articulating his best possible regime, Hobbes focused on the third promise outlined above. Hobbes referred to this third promise as the "social covenant". Hobbes considered the social covenant, like the state of nature, to be a thought-experiment; Hobbes's social covenant did not denote a historical reality, but instead attempted to capture the underlying logic of everyday life. But, whereas the state of nature was an attempt to capture the logic of everyday life within a dysfunctional body politic, the social covenant was an attempt to capture the logic of everyday life within a well-ordered body politic. Hobbes used the thought-experiment of the social covenant to emphasize that a well-ordered body politic can only be sustained if each individual understands why they have promised to oblige themselves to a powerful sovereign of their own creation. Hobbes's social covenant is, in this respect, a regulative ideal: individuals must act as if they are responsible for the erection of the body politic by way of an explicit promise, in the form of a covenant. Hobbes outlined the particular form of this covenant as follows: "I Authorize and give up my Right of Governing my selfe, to this Man, or to this Assembly of men, on this condition, that thou give up thy Right to him, and Authorise all his Actions in like manner" (Lev, II, XVII, p. 227). Individuals transfer this right, "to the end that he [the sovereign] may use the strength and means of them all, as he shall think expedient, for their Peace and Common Defence" (Lev, II, XVII, p. 228). In other words, individuals must act as if they had alienated their natural right to the sovereign to ensure the peace and security of all. The social covenant signifies

---

Hobbes argued we never transfer our natural right in toto. Security is the goal, and we retain our natural right to do anything necessary to preserve ourselves. This creates certain political problems, which I will explore in greater depth in Transition A. For example, the sovereign never has the right to demand an individual kill himself. Furthermore, Hobbes claimed that anyone condemned to death may justly resist the sovereign power, "For they but defend their lives, which the Guilty man may as well do, as the Innocent" (Lev, II, XXI, p. 270). Hobbes also claimed that when soldiers run from a battle "when they do it not out of treachery, but fear, they are not esteemed to do it unjustly, but dishonourably" (Lev, II, XXI, p. 270). In these extreme cases, the terms of the covenant pit the natural right of individuals against the rights of the sovereign power, and there is no way to arbitrate these claims except through violence. Hobbes makes a feeble effort to avoid some of the difficulties of this position when he argues that if natural right "frustrates the End for which the Soveraignty was ordained" (Lev, II, XXI, p. 269), then invoking natural right against sovereign right is in vain. Also, Hobbes argued that "he that pretendeth a Right of Nature to preserve his owne body, cannot pretend a
that we have come to understand that the war of all against all is the natural consequence of our physiology and that we must create a strong government if we are to avoid the fate of violent death.

After outlining how the individual must think and act if a peaceful commonwealth is to be established, Hobbes concentrated on what the sovereign power must be and how the sovereign must act if to sustain a peaceful commonwealth. The sovereign power must, Hobbes argued, be constituted in such a way that, through a balance of fear and reason, it can make sure the subjects live up to their promises. This is, according to Hobbes, a very delicate balance. The sovereign has been erected by the people and only possesses the authority to govern for as long as the people feel themselves to be the authors of the government. As Hobbes put it, “For the power of the mighty hath no foundation but in the opinion and belief of the people” (*Beh*, I, 16). To ensure that individuals live up to their promises, the sovereign must be able to employ force and violence (or at least their threat), but the sovereign cannot rely on force and violence alone. The sovereign must also nurture its subjects’ rational comprehension of why they entered into the social covenant and why they are in need of the discipline imposed by the sovereign. The relationship between violence and education is very precise. To tip the scales too far in the direction of violence is to push the dynamics of human motion too far. That is, if individuals begin to feel that the sovereign is employing violence either too harshly or indiscriminately, the natural impulse of self-preservation will begin to generate resistance and thereby sow the seeds of rebellion (which Hobbes called a natural punishment for the “Negligent government of Princes” [*Lev*, II, XXXI, p. 407]). Likewise, to tip the scales too far in the direction of education is to weaken the community. That is, though the sovereign must constantly remind its subjects about why they entered the social covenant and about the connection between a strong government and commodious living, the sovereign should never overestimate the effectiveness of such reminders. Unless individuals

Right of Nature to destroy him, by whose strength he is preserved” (*Lev*, A Review, and Conclusion, p. 719).
are fearful of the consequences of breaking their promises they will break these promises when it is convenient to do so even if they have been constantly educated about the necessity and benefits of government (for, “Covenants, without the Sword, are but Words, and of no strength to secure a man at all.” [Lev, II, XVII, p. 223]). The sovereign power must therefore be institutionalized such that it (i) is capable of using the sword to restrain the desires of individuals and, at the same time, (ii) supplements the sword with the continual educational reminder about why individuals were led to authorize and oblige themselves to the sovereign through the social contract. The use of sovereign power is a strategic art of cultivating an anxiety that deters any contemplation of violating the laws while at the same time cultivating an understanding of why political obligation is in everyone’s self-interest.

Given the dynamics of human physiology and psychology the Hobbesian Leviathan is a delicate creature.\(^{13}\) Hobbes granted the sovereign a monopoly of power and violence to give it the appearance of omnipotence, but in the long run the sovereign cannot impose its will on the subjects. The sovereign remains alive only as long as its subjects remain willing to recognize themselves as its authors. The state of nature is the founding myth of the Leviathan, and the meaning of the state of nature must always be in the mind of each subject if sovereign power is to endure. This founding myth must always be remembered because it

\(^{13}\)Hobbes draws our attention to this fact, reminding the reader that the name Leviathan is a Biblical reference. Hobbes explained that he compared his sovereign to the Leviathan based on the following passage in which God describes the Leviathan to Job: “There is nothing, saith he, on earth, to be compared with him. He is made so as not to be afraid. He seeth every high thing below him; and he is King of all the children of pride”. But Hobbes continued: “But because he is morall, and subject to decay, as all other Earthly creatures are; and because there is that in heaven, (though not on earth) that he should stand in fear of, and whose Lawes he ought to obey; I shall in the next following Chapter speak of his Diseases, and the causes of his Mortality; and of what Lawes of Nature he is bound to obey” (Lev, II, XXVIII, pp. 362-363). As powerful as the Leviathan is, he is not omnipotent; the Leviathan is, in Hobbes’s terminology, a “Mortall God” (Lev, II, XVII, p. 227). But Hobbes believed his own political philosophy could be used to dramatically reduce the vulnerability of the Leviathan. “Though nothing can be immortall,” Hobbes argued, “which mortals make; yet, if men had the use of reason they pretend to, their Common-wealths might be secured, at least, from perishing by internall diseases ... [W]hen [Common-wealths] come to be dissolved, not by externall violence, but intestine disorder, the fault is not in men, as they are the Matter; but as they are the Makers, and orderers of them” (Lev, II, XXIX, p. 363).
is the basis upon which Hobbes believed individuals will be persuaded to continually authorize the sovereign power. Furthermore, the sovereign must recognize the necessity of this persuasion and forgo the temptation to protect the social order through violence alone. In a rhetorical flourish, Hobbes conceded that in considering the complexity of sustaining the commonwealth, “I am at the point of believing this my labour, as uselesse, as the Commonwealth of Plato”, because, like Plato, Hobbes was of the opinion that “the disorders of State, and changes of Governments by Civill Warre” would never end until “Soveraigns be Philosophers” (\textit{Lev}, II, XXXI, p. 407). Hobbes, however, claimed that he found hope in the fact that:

\begin{quote}
neither Plato, not any other Philosopher hitherto, hath put into order, and sufficiently, or probably proved all the Theoremes of Morall doctrine, that men may learn thereby, both how to govern, and how to obey; I recover some hope, that one time or other, this writing of mine, may fall into the hands of a Soveraign, who will consider it himselfe, (for it is short, and I think clear,) without the help of any interested, or envious Interpreter; and by the exercise of entire Soveraignty, in protecting the Publique teaching of it, convert this Truth of Speculation, into the Utility of Practice. (\textit{Lev}, II, XXXI, pp. 407-408)\
\end{quote}

Hobbes believed the only thing needed to convert the “Truth of Speculation” into the “Utility of Practice” was for each of us to admit that human desire is as he described it. The fear inspired by a true understanding of desire, Hobbes hoped, would be enough to break the cycle of the continual frustration of human aspirations through violence by making possible the drama of political self-discipline through the creation of a powerful body politic.

\footnote{Though Hobbes invokes Plato, he does so to put forward a completely different understanding of the scope of political philosophy. A Hobbesian “philosopher-king” does not look toward the forms but toward the physiological causes of human behaviour, and the goal of the Hobbesian philosopher-king is neither the harmonization of the soul nor the actualization of truth but the production of peace (“For Doctrine repugnant to Peace, can no more be True, than Peace and Concord can be against the Law of Nature” \textit{[Lev}, II, XVIII, p. 233]). Along the same lines, Hobbesian “persuasion” has nothing to do with Socratic persuasion. For Hobbes, the eduction of subjects does not have to go beyond the cultivation of opinion. All that is required is that subjects believe government is necessary, and this belief does not have to be reinforced by a complete understanding of the mechanics of human motion. It was by leaving behind the ancient understanding of both political philosophy and persuasion that Hobbes believed it would become possible to translate the “Truth of Speculation” into the “Utility of Practice”.}
Conclusion

In his philosophy Hobbes attempted to come to terms with the terrible consequences of our natural condition and show us how to overcome these consequences in and through the art of politics. Our physiology cuts us off from the objective and at the same time programs us to pursue pleasure and avoid pain—a combination that condemns us to a life characterized by the pursuit of power and the existence of mutual mistrust. Because we are cut off from objectivity, there is no immediate, natural bond between humans. The absence of such a bond ensures that human motion—the motion of desire—inevitably tends toward mutual mistrust and conflict. Hobbes claimed that, when stripped down to its essence, our natural condition is nothing more than an endless war of all against all. Hobbes argued that, when faced with this truth, we are forced to admit that our natural condition is defective and to seek its remedy. Though Hobbes believed it was neither possible nor desirable to transform human nature itself, he claimed that we could remedy its defects by imitating god and creating a sovereign—an artificial person—whose dictates would imitate objectivity and whose power would imitate omnipotence. Such a sovereign, Hobbes insisted, is the only means by which we can regulate desire and bring about a true state of peace. The (pseudo) objectivity of the sovereign commands to which we are obligated, and the (pseudo) omnipotence of the sovereign fostered by the fear of the sword will bring about peace by ensuring that we all live up to the promise that established the foundation of the body politic. If peace is to become a reality, we must each recognize our nature for what it is and, on the basis of this recognition, construct a sovereign capable of disciplining desire.

The shape of Hobbes’s political project was informed by his understanding of life. In Hobbes’s presentation, life is at the root of our political problems, but it is also at the root of the solution to these problems. On the one hand, it is the physiology of life that creates the “human condition”. The physiology of sensation separates human beings from objectivity,
and the physiology of vital motion ensures that human life is structured by a pursuit of pleasure and an avoidance of pain. When coupled with the psychological anxiety about the future, the physiology of life makes the natural condition of man a war of all against all. On the other hand, however, life is also the means by which the defects of the human condition are to be overcome. Here, Hobbes turned from the consideration of physiology to a consideration of the fundamental equality of human beings—human beings are equal in their capacity to kill and to be killed. Hobbes wanted to use this fundamental equality to prove that the logical outcome of the war of all against all was violent death. The conceptualization of our mortality and its consequences was, according to Hobbes, the beginning of our political education. The fear inspired by the threat of violent death leads us away from the natural dynamics of life toward the artificial dynamics of politics. Politics, as Hobbes presented it, can be seen as a case of “life against life”. We self-consciously turn away from the natural dynamics of life because we want to preserve our life. Life, then, was something of a paradox with Hobbes: the physiology of life was responsible for the difficulties of the human condition, but the desire to preserve life was the means by which these difficulties could be overcome.

Given the role that it plays within Hobbes’s philosophy, life was a political category. First, life became a political category because the study of physiology was, according to Hobbes, not to be undertaken for medical purposes alone but also political purposes. Physiology takes on a political significance insofar as our physiology determines the dynamics of human motion. At its core, all human action is rooted in human physiology and, as such, political action is likewise rooted in physiology. In this respect, the study of physiology is essential not only in uncovering the true dynamics of human motion, but also in discovering the political regime that can channel these dynamics in peaceful directions. Secondly, life became a political category because what was called “mere life” by Aristotle had become for Hobbes the very foundation of politics. According to Hobbes, the most basic natural right was the right to self-preservation. Furthermore, Hobbes believed the fear
inspired by the fragility of mere life could persuade individuals to enter the social co-venant. In this respect, the desire for self-preservation was, according to Hobbes, at the root of social life. Finally, the fundamental goal of the sovereign created by the social covenant is the protection of mere life. For Hobbes, physiology and mere life replaced metaphysics, objectivity, and truth as the categories that were to be used to understand what politics is and ought to be. For Hobbes, politics was reduced to a dialectic between life and power. In its most immediate, natural form, this dialectic culminated in destruction. In its mediated, conceptualized form, however, this dialectic culminated in the creation of a secure and peaceful commonwealth. And it is this uniting of life and politics that would constitute Hobbes's most significant legacy.

In all of his works, Hobbes simply assumed that life was the most stable concept possible. In fact, Hobbes was so convinced of this that even though he placed life at the very heart of his account of politics and power, he never really turned life itself into an object of inquiry. Instead, Hobbes employed life as a universal category that was able to cut beneath all the differences among human beings and reveal a fundamental similarity. Life, then, assumed the status of an ethical standard insofar as Hobbes used life to grant his own

---

1 It is worth comparing Aristotle and Hobbes on this point. Aristotle famously claimed that "man is by nature a political animal." Because man is a political animal, "people desire to live a social life even when they stand in no need of mutual succour ... . The good life is the chief end, both for the community as a whole and for each of us individually." Aristotle continued with a passage that could have come from the Leviathan: "But people also come together, and form and maintain political associations, merely for the sake of life; for perhaps there is some element of the good even in the simple fact of living, so long as the evils of existence do not preponderate too heavily. It is an evident fact that most people cling hard enough to life to be willing to endure a great deal of suffering, which implies that life has in it a sort of healthy happiness and a natural quality of pleasure" (Aristotle, Politics. III, 6, p. 98). Several books later, however, Aristotle clarified his position. Even if people do come together and form political associations for the sake of life, mere life should never be understood to be the goal of political association. "Otherwise," Aristotle explained, "there might be a city of slaves, or even a city of animals; but in the world as we know it any such city is impossible, because slaves and animals do not share in happiness nor in living according to their own choice. Similarly, it is not the end of the city to provide an alliance for mutual defence against all injury ..." (ibid. III, 9, p. 104). Aristotle did not consider the claims of mere life strong enough either to undermine the institution of slavery (as did Hobbes) nor to extend the rights of political association to species other than homo sapiens (as do animal-rights advocates).
political project a universal applicability. The concept of life, however, was to prove to be more fluid than Hobbes anticipated; and while life did not remain the abstract, universal concept employed by Hobbes, it did retain its connection to politics and power as well as its ethical character. Life, which was used by Hobbes as a concept that cut through difference, would be itself divided and qualified, with the result that life itself was slowly transformed into a political problem. That life was the alpha and omega of politics and power was not seriously questioned. Instead, what was questioned was the form or way of life that should serve as the basis of politics. Hobbes’s connection of life and politics thereby opened the way for the development of a type of politics that would seek to deny certain bodies entry into the peaceful commonwealth. While for Hobbes life itself was the basis for citizenship, once life ceased to be a universal concept, citizenship became the domain of those who embodied the particular form of life that was deemed to be the basis of the best possible political order. In the next part of my thesis, I will consider exactly how Hobbes’s understanding of life was radicalized such that life became a category of exclusion rather than inclusion.
Part 2: Bentham

Politicizing Pleasure and Pain

If someone who is guilty in relation to society is not free in his actions ... he is clearly not guilty at all and only deserves compassion. ... For, Good God, what equity is there to take the life of a miserable wretch, who is the slave of the blood galloping in his veins, as the hand of a watch is the slave of the works which make it move? And how right was the thought of that famous destroyer of human liberty when he dared to say that there was more reason than justice in condemning criminals to death!

La Mettrie, Anti-Seneca or the Sovereign Good
Hobbes occupies a strange position within modern political philosophy in that he is the founder of something quite un-Hobbesian. Though Hobbes’s political project was built on the concept of life, and this concept would play a central role in all political philosophy after him; whereas Hobbes had placed life at the origin but beyond the scope of political power, after Hobbes life slowly became an object of political power. This transformation represents a certain radicalization of Hobbes, generating an understanding of the relation between life and political power quite different than that of Hobbes. Hobbes had argued that our physiology forced us to create the Leviathan to bring about peaceful coexistence; an absolute sovereign was the only way to ensure that human motion did not lead to violence between individuals. But Hobbes’s understanding of the role of mere life in the creation of government caused him to articulate a somewhat peculiar account of absolute power. Hobbes had written that in a “perfect city”, there is always “a supreme power in some one, greater than which cannot by right be conferred by men, or greater than which no mortal man can have over himself. But that power, greater than which cannot by men be conveyed on a man, we call absolute” (Civ, II, VI, §13, p. 77). Hobbes’s caveat “by right” is of central importance to his understanding of the scope of absolute power. The sovereign’s power, Hobbes explained, was authorized by the individual’s transference of right through the social covenant, and, “the motive, and end for which this renouncing, and transferring of Right is introduced, is nothing else but the security of a mans person, in his life, and in the means of so preserving life” (Lev, II, XIV, p. 192). Each individual thus enters the social covenant to secure his own life, and the individual can never “by right” transfer away the most basic right of self-preservation. Life and the natural right of self-preservation are, because the rationale of the social covenant, beyond the absolute power of the sovereign. By making mere life the
basis of the social covenant, Hobbes’s political philosophy was built on the principle that the
individual could never authorize his own death at the hand of the sovereign.¹

Hobbes’s claim that life could limit the power of the sovereign put him in a somewhat
unique position in the development of the modern definition of sovereignty. The modern
definition of sovereignty was shaped by a tradition that began with Bodin (which extends
into the present day) and that defined sovereignty as the right to decide matters of war and
peace and the right to decide matters of life and death.² Within Hobbes’s system, however,

¹Of course, Hobbes went farther than “mere existence”. He argued that the end of sovereign power
was the “safety of the people” but added, “Safety here, is not meant a bare Preservation, but also all
other Contentments of life, which every man by lawfull Industry, without danger, or hurt to the
Commonwealth, shall acquire to himselfe” (Lev, II, XXX, p. 376). For Hobbes, “bare Preservation” is
only the minimum that must be provided by sovereign power. But this bare minimum is guaranteed,
whereas the individual has no guarantee that he will actually be able to amass the “Contentments of
life”. “And this [safety] is intended should be done,” Hobbes explained, “not by care applied to
individuals, further than their protection from injuries, when they shall complain; but by a generall
Providence, contained in publique Instruction, both of Doctrine, and Example; and in the making, and
executing of good Laws, to which individual persons may apply their own cases” (Lev, II, XXX, p.
376). The sovereign must protect the life of each and every individual, but the sovereign does not
have to provide each and every individual with prosperity. Regarding the “Contentments of life”, the
role of the sovereign is to provide ‘equality of opportunity’ rather than ‘equality of result’.

²Bodin outlined the “marks” that distinguish the sovereign from all others and he argued that the right
of “making and repealing laws” was the fundamental mark of sovereignty. “This same power of
making and repealing laws,” Bodin explained, “includes all the other rights and privileges of
sovereignty, so that strictly speaking we can say that there is only this one prerogative of sovereignty,
inasmuch as all the other rights are comprehended in it” (Jean Bodin. On Sovereignty. p. 58). The
sovereign right of making and repealing laws grants the sovereign the right to declare war and make
peace (which is, “one of the most important points of majesty, because it often entails the ruin or the
preservation of a state” [ibid. p. 59]), and the right to impose capital punishment and the right to
pardon an individual convicted of a capital offence (if, “a sovereign prince yields the right of last
appeal ... and gives it to a vassal, he turns his subject into a sovereign prince” [ibid. p. 71]). Most
recently, the tradition begun by Bodin has been summarized by Carl Schmitt’s statement, “Sovereign
is he who decides on the exception” (Carl Schmitt. Political Theology. p. 5). Schmitt claimed that
“long ago” Bodin had articulated the same understanding of sovereignty. Schmitt wrote, “Because the
authority to suspend valid law—be it in general or in a specific case—is so much the actual mark of
sovereignty, Bodin wanted to derive from this authority all other characteristics (declaring war and
making peace, appointing civil servants, right of pardon, final appeal, and so on)” (ibid. p. 9). But
neither Bodin nor Hobbes would have embraced Schmitt’s definition of sovereignty. Bodin, though
he declared sovereign power to be “the absolute and perpetual power of a commonwealth” (On
Sovereignty. p. 1), also claimed that the sovereign was subordinate to God and God’s natural law. The
sovereign, then, did not have an uncontested power of decision or an uncontested ability to make and
repeal law. Hobbes, as I will argue, used the natural right to self-preservation to much the same effect.
There is, however, one crucial difference between Bodin’s use of natural law (and perhaps natural law
theories in general) and Hobbes’s use of natural right: Hobbes’s natural right of self-preservation
the sovereign right of life and death was thrown into question. The sovereign, Hobbes argued, did have the right to inflict death. But given that the right of self-preservation was fundamental and inalienable, Hobbes’s sovereign did not possess an uncontestable right to inflict death; the right to self-preservation never allows the individual to authorize his own death at the hand of the sovereign and, in fact, the right to self-preservation grants the individual the right to resist the sovereign’s right to inflict death. Hobbes’s position, then, is quite complex. Hobbes argued the sovereign possessed the right to inflict death, but he also argued that the individual had the right to resist death. The coexistence of these two claims suggests a certain antimony at the heart of Hobbes’s political philosophy; one can make equally valid arguments for the sovereign’s right to inflict death and the individual’s right to resist death. That Hobbes was aware of this antimony and its implications is most evident in his theory of crime and punishment. The sovereign’s right to punish (which includes the death penalty) was not, according to Hobbes, “grounded on any concession, or gift of the Subjects” (Lev, II, XVIII, p. 354). Hobbes instead argued: “before the Institution of the Common-wealth, every man had a right to every thing, and to do whatsoever he thought necessary to his own preservation; subduing, hurting, or killing any man in order thereunto. And this is the foundation of that right of Punishing” (Lev, II, XXVIII, p. 354). Hobbes concluded that the right to everything was not “given” but “left” to the sovereign by the 

outlines the limits of a sovereign’s right to make uncontested decisions with a clarity that can never be provided by natural law. Bodin, for example, was not able to clearly separate natural law and civil law and the result, according to Preston King, was, “an extraordinary tension in political theory” (Preston King. The Ideology of Order. p. 138). In Bodin’s presentation, King argued, there is, “no obvious line of demarkation between the civil law and the natural law; no obvious distinction between what is conventionally right and what is naturally right; between the will of God and that of the prince. Where these distinctions weaken or fail, the result is that far more power is conferred upon the sovereign than Bodin may have intended, or desired” (ibid. p. 139). But even if Bodin’s notion of natural law is surrounded by ambiguity, his use of natural law demonstrates that Schmitt’s self-proclaimed connection to Bodin is only convincing to the extent that the idea of natural law and natural right have been either wholly abandoned or rendered subservient to civil law. In what follows I will outline how Hobbes’s idea of the natural right to self-preservation was made subservient to the sovereign’s right to life and death—a move which, among other things, paved the way for Schmitt’s appropriation of Hobbes.
subjects, and it was left "as entire, as in the condition of meer Nature, and of warre of every one against his neighbour" (*Lev.*, II, XXVIII, p. 354). The sovereign can inflict death because the sovereign still possesses natural right in its full scope. Subjects, on the other hand, no longer possess the natural right to "everything"; subjects have alienated this right to everything in and through the social covenant. But even though subjects alienate the natural right to everything, they do not and cannot alienate the natural right to self-preservation. And it is because the natural right to self-preservation is inalienable that subjects have the right to resist death, even when death is a punishment imposed by the sovereign. The natural right to self-preservation, then, is what allowed Hobbes to argue that in certain situations the rights of the individual could be in opposition to the sovereign's right to create and execute the law.\(^3\)

In what follows, I will explore Hobbes's theory of crime and punishment in greater detail to highlight how and why the rights of the sovereign and the rights of the individual can, in certain situations, find themselves opposed. I will also examine Locke's theory of crime and punishment to show how Locke managed to avoid the collision between sovereign and individual rights without having to abandon mere life as the foundation of the body politic. I want to sketch Locke's alternative because, as I will suggest, at the heart of Locke's theory of

---

3This point has not always been clearly understood. Leo Strauss, for example, writing about the death penalty, argued: "Hobbes in fact admitted that there exists an insoluble conflict between the rights of the government and the natural right of the individual to self-preservation. This conflict was solved in the spirit, if against the letter, of Hobbes by Beccaria, who inferred from the absolute primacy of the right of self-preservation the necessity of abolishing capital punishment" (*Natural Right and History*. p. 197. See also, Mario A. Cattaneo, "Hobbes's Theory of Punishment" in K.C. Brown, ed. *Hobbes Studies*. pp. 291-294). Strauss made a similar argument about war. The priority of self-preservation, "destroyed the moral basis of national defence. The only solution to this difficulty which preserves the spirit of Hobbes's political philosophy is the outlawry of war or the establishment of a world state" (*Natural Right and History*. pp. 197-198). Strauss' analysis of the "spirit" of Hobbes's political philosophy is only persuasive if the natural right to self-preservation is limited to the individual. If, however, Hobbes's own claim that the natural right to self-preservation is a right of both the sovereign and individual subjects is taken into consideration, then neither the abolition of the death penalty nor the outlawry of war can be seen to be in either the letter or the spirit of Hobbes's political philosophy. The fact that both the individual and the government possess the same natural right makes the tension between the rights of the sovereign and the rights of the subject and irresolvable tension.
crime and punishment is a logic that set the stage for the much more dramatic radicalization of Hobbes's political project undertaken by Bentham.

THE CRIMINAL'S LIFE

For Hobbes all crime had a political dimension. Hobbes defined crime as, "Committing (by Deed, or Word) of that which the Law forbiddeth, or the Omission of what it hath commanded" (*Lev*, II, XXVII, p. 336). The law, Hobbes claimed, was a command issued by the sovereign and could be envisioned as "Artificial Chains:" that the subjects, "by mutuall covenants, have fastened at one end, to the lips of that Man, or Assembly, to whom they have given the Soveraigne Power; and at the other end to their own Ears" (*Lev*, II, XXI, p. 264). The substance of these artificial chains were the "mutuall covenants," of which the most fundamental was the original social covenant. The connection between the law and the original social covenant implies that, at its core, crime is not simply the refusal to obey a particular command of the sovereign; it is also a refusal to honour the terms of the social covenant. And if all crime is a violation of the social covenant, then all crime tends to weaken the very foundation of the state. This weakening of the foundation of the state makes crime a political rather than merely social problem. Hobbes insisted that if crime is political in nature, then the response to crime—punishment—must also be political. The right to punish rests with the sovereign alone (*Lev*, II, XXVIII, p. 354), and the sovereign must be in control of the creation and execution of the law (*Lev*, II, XVIII, p. 234). Punishment is the sovereign's main weapon in the effort to prevent the erosion of the social covenant through crime.

It is often claimed that Hobbes articulated a "command theory of law": law and punishment are grounded in the will of the sovereign. This claim is true as far as it goes. But Hobbes did not view law and punishment simply as the sovereign's right to define and punish crime; because of his understanding of life, Hobbes did not leave matters of law and punishment to the discretion of the sovereign. Instead, life and its natural rights place clear limits on how and when the sovereign is able to punish an individual. It is at this point that
the antinomy in Hobbes’s system emerges. Hobbes’s understanding of life introduced three unique elements into his theory of crime and punishment: (i) though the criminal has attacked the state, the criminal is not an “enemy of the state” nor is punishment a form of war; (ii) the obligation of the law only exists when following the law does not jeopardize self-preservation; and (iii) though the sovereign has the right to impose corporal punishment, the individual also has a right to resist corporal punishment. In these three ways, Hobbes’s definition of life profoundly shaped his claims about crime and punishment, and I will examine each in more detail to highlight exactly what the radicalization of Hobbes’s understanding of life attempted to remedy.

Hobbes argued that crime, though an attack on the social covenant, does not automatically make the criminal an enemy of the state. “For though all Crimes,” Hobbes explained, “doe equally deserve the name of Injustice, as all deviation from a strait line is equally crookedness ... yet it does not follow that all crooked lines are equally crooked ... ” (Lev, II, XXVII, p. 345). Injustice, according to Hobbes, is the breaking of one’s promises, and the most severe injustice is the violation of the social covenant (see Lev, I, XIV, p. 191). But, while all crime represents a violation of the social covenant, not all crimes violate it in the same way. There is, according to Hobbes, a fundamental difference between a crime that indirectly attacks and a crime that directly attacks the social covenant. The first type of crime is an ‘ordinary crime’ where though ignoring one of the sovereign’s commands, the criminal does not intend to repudiate the social covenant as a whole. The second type of crime is an ‘extraordinary crime’ where the criminal does want to repudiate the social covenant as a whole. Hobbes insisted that the sovereign must treat these two individuals quite differently. Hobbes argued that the individual, who:

shall by fact, or word, wittingly, and deliberately deny the authority of the Representative of the Common-wealth, (whatsoever penalty hath been formerly ordained for Treason,) he may lawfully be made to suffer whatsoever the Representative will: For in denying subjection, he denies such Punishment as by the Law hath been ordained; and therefore suffers as an enemy of the Common-wealth ... . For the Punishments set down in the Law, are to Subjects, not to Enemies; such as
are they, that having been by their own act Subjects, deliberately revolting, deny the Sovereign Power. (*Lev*, II, XXVIII, p. 357)

Those who have committed ordinary crimes, on the other hand, can only be punished according to the law, which must, Hobbes insisted, be both codified and public. Only those who have committed extraordinary crimes, because they have rejected the social covenant, can be punished according to the discretion of the sovereign; as Hobbes explained, in this case, “all infliction of evill is lawfull” (*Lev*, II, XXVIII, p. 356). “Hence it follows,” Hobbes wrote, “that rebels, traitors, and all others convicted of treason, are punished not by civil, but natural right, that is to say, not as civil subjects, but as enemies to the government, not by the right of sovereignty and dominion, but by the right of war” (*Civ*, II, XIV, §22, p. 170). For Hobbes, ordinary crimes and their punishment cannot and should not ever be understood in terms of war. Criminals who have not explicitly renounced the social covenant must, in spite of their actions, be treated with due process.¹ To speak of ordinary criminals as “enemies of the state” is to invoke a dangerously misleading metaphor. To treat all criminals as enemies of the state, suggested Hobbes, was to undermine the social covenant by introducing elements of the state of nature and war into the commonwealth. If the sovereign fails to respect due process and instead executes the law at his discretion, the use of force and violence will appear indiscriminate; and, human motion being what it is, indiscriminate violence will inevitably provoke individuals to rebel against the sovereign.

¹For an enumeration of Hobbes’s understanding of due process see Edward G. Andrew, “Hobbes on Conscience Within the Law and Without”, *Canadian Journal of Political Science*. XXXII: 2. June 1999. pp. 217-218. In this article, Andrew provides an interesting analysis of the role of juries within Hobbes’s theory of crime and punishment. Juries, Andrew argues, represent the institutionalization of conscience within the system of law, because for Hobbes jurors make decisions about matters of fact and matters of law. A jury, then, has the ability to decide that a particular command of the sovereign does not have the force of law, and, in this respect, “Specific juries and the will of the sovereign may conflict” (*ibid*. p. 221). Andrew claims that the possibility of a conflict between the will of the sovereign and a jury served to strengthen rather than weaken the commonwealth. Allowing juries the ability to decide matters of law was, Andrew suggests, Hobbes’s attempt to harmonize the sovereign’s will and the will of the people. Andrew writes, “Commands are not effective commands unless they are actually obeyed. The jury system, as mediating the relation of ruler to ruled, makes law as command effective and facilitates the sovereign’s ability to rule with sword in sheath” (*ibid*. p. 222).
Hobbes’s understanding of life, then, introduced the idea of due process into his theory of crime and punishment. Hobbes’s understanding of life also caused him to advance a somewhat surprising account of when and why an individual is obliged to follow the law. “That which totally Excuseth a Fact,” Hobbes wrote, “and takes away from it the nature of a Crime, can be none but that, which at the same time, taketh away the obligation of the Law” (Lev, II, XXVII, p. 345). The obligation of the law is “taken away” or suspended when to follow the law would threaten an individual’s self-preservation. In such a case, an individual can engage in an illegality—a violation of the law—that cannot be considered a crime. “When a man destitute of food,” Hobbes argued, “or other thing necessary for his life, and cannot preserve himself any other way, but by some fact against the Law ... he is totally Excused” (Lev, II, XXVII, p. 346). The obligation to follow the law is linked to the purpose of the law. The law exists to facilitate the individual’s self-preservation. A law that threatens self-preservation has, according to Hobbes, no binding force; individuals, even though they have promised to obey the social covenant, are never obliged to follow a law that threatens self-preservation.  

This account of obligation leads to a counter-intuitive understanding of crime—crime only exits within well-ordered commonwealths. Law is only obliging if and when to follow the law does not entail the jeopardizing of the individual’s self-preservation.

Alongside Hobbes’s account of obligation there is also a certain antinomy at the heart of his theory of crime and punishment. The obligation of the law is suspended when the law threatens the self-preservation of the individual; but Hobbes also argued that the individual, if convicted of a crime, has the right to resist punishment. Hobbes believed that the original social covenant did not, and could not, signify the individual’s agreement not to resist punishment. Hobbes claimed:

---

5This notion of the suspension of obligation can be used to argue that Hobbes provides grounds to build a claim that the sovereign has at least a prudential duty to ensure that each subject has the capacity to ensure their self-preservation. It is not enough that the sovereign refrain from directly threatening the lives of his subjects; the sovereign must also take steps to ensure that subjects have all they need to live. If the sovereign does not provide that which is necessary for self-preservation, then the sovereign opens the possibility of violations of the law that are not crimes.
A covenant not to defend myself from force, is alwayes voyd. For ... no man can transferre, or lay down his Right to save himself from Death, Wounds, and Imprisonment ... . And this is granted to be true by all men, in that they lead Criminals to Execution, and Prison, with armed men, notwithstanding that such Criminals have consented to the Law, by which they are condemned. *(Lev, I, XIV, p. 199)*

The social covenant, because it does not imply the individual’s consent not to defend himself from force, creates an antinomy at the heart of the body politic. On the one hand, the social covenant authorizes a sovereign with a right to create law and a right to use force to execute the law. On the other hand, however, the social covenant leaves the individual free to defend himself against the force employed in the execution of the law. According to the terms of the social covenant, then, the sovereign is well within his rights when he punishes his subjects, but subjects are also well within their rights when they resist punishment. Theoretically, there is no resolution to this antinomy of contradictory rights. There is, however, a practical solution: the sovereign, who exercises a degree of force surpassing that of the individual, can easily render the individual’s right to resist impotent. That this antinomy can be, and usually is, practically resolved in favor of the sovereign does not, however, eliminate the important implications of this antinomy. Because the rights of the individual can stand in direct opposition to the rights of the sovereign, Hobbes’s concept of life created a body politic in which the rights of the individual are never fully subordinated to the rights of the sovereign. Though Hobbes claimed that to achieve peace the individual must be governed by an absolute sovereign, Hobbes never argued that once the social covenant was formed the individual was completely absorbed into the metabolism of the body politic. According to Hobbes, the individual’s right to self-preservation allowed the individual to remain an

---

*Here, by including “wounds and imprisonment”, Hobbes seems to expand the individual’s right to self-preservation beyond the immediate threat of death. Hobbes argued that entering the social covenant was a voluntary act and that the object of every voluntary act was some good. It is because individuals enter the social covenant for some good that the individual can never covenant away the right to resist wounds and imprisonment. Hobbes explained, “there is no benefit consequent to such patience; as there is to the patience of suffering another to be wounded, or imprisoned: as also because a man cannot tell, when he seeth men proceed against him by violence, whether they intend his death or not” *(Lev, I, XIV, p. 192).*
integral unit with a certain autonomy from the body politic. Hobbes resisted what was to prove to be an extremely strong temptation—invoking the sovereign’s right to defend the body politic from crime to prove that the rights of the individual are not inalienable natural rights but political rights that are forfeit if and when the individual violates his duties to the sovereign. After Hobbes, the attempt to find a way to maintain the priority of mere life while at the same time fully subordinating the rights of the individual to the rights of the sovereign became a preoccupation of modern political philosophy.

The attempt to find a way to subordinate the rights of the individual to the rights of the sovereign without abandoning the priority of mere life began very shortly after Hobbes. For instance this attempt can be found in the political philosophy of Locke. Though Locke did not abandon Hobbes’s claim that the goal of government was the preservation of life, Locke put forward a theory of crime and punishment that, unlike Hobbes’s, granted governments the uncontested right to inflict death. How Locke transformed the status of the individual’s rights can be seen in Locke’s account of the state of nature. Locke, unlike Hobbes, claimed that in the state of nature the individual must conform to the “bounds of the law of Nature”. The law of nature, Locke explained, was a set of rules (which were both reasonable and divinely sanctioned) that prohibited, among other things, harming others and theft; and that granted individuals a right to self-preservation and a duty to preserve others. Locke claimed that to violate the law of nature, even in the state of nature, was to engage in an “unjust use of force”, and he argued:

In transgressing the law of Nature, the offender declares himself to live by another rule than that of reason and common equity, which is that measure God has set to the actions of mankind for their mutual security, and so he becomes dangerous to mankind; the tie which is to secure them from injury and violence being slighted and broken by him, which being a trespass against the whole species, and the peace and safety of it, provided for by the law of Nature, every man upon this score, by the right he have to preserve mankind in general, may restrain, or where it is necessary,

\footnote{John Locke. Second Treatise of Government. II, §4, pp. 118-119.}

\footnote{Ibid. II, §6, pp. 119-120.}
destroy things noxious to them, and so may bring such evil on any one who hath transgressed that law ... 

In effect, by committing an "unjust use of force" the individual declares war on humanity, and in so doing, Locke claimed, "makes a forfeiture of his life. For quitting reason, which is the rule given between man and man, and using force, the way of beasts, he becomes liable to be destroyed by him he uses force against, as any savage ravenous beast that is dangerous to his being". To declare war on humanity is to be transformed from someone who, living by the rules of humanity, is protected by natural rights into someone who, by unjustly employing violence, becomes like a savage beast; a life that because it endangers humans is forfeit and does not deserve to live.

Locke directly transferred this understanding of crime and punishment in the state of nature to the body politic. To violate the laws of the state—which, Locke argued, are based on the law of nature—is to declare war on the state. The criminal, then, is not to be treated by the state as a rational human being but as an irrational and dangerous beast. In this respect, Locke's theory of crime and punishment removed Hobbes's injunction against presenting the criminal as an enemy of the state; for Locke, the criminal demonstrates though his unjust use of force that he is a danger not only to the state but also to humanity as a whole. The punishment of the criminal is not justified, as with Hobbes, by the sovereign's "right to every thing", but because, as a dangerous individual the criminal has forfeited his right to life.

---

9Ibid. II, §8, pp. 120-121.
11Locke articulated a rather complex argument about exactly when the "destruction" of such a noxious creature is permissible. Locke argued that punishment should be commensurate with the crime. Death, then, should be reserved for the most serious crimes, such as murder and treason. When dealing with less severe crimes, "Each transgression may be punished to that degree, and with so much severity, as will suffice to make it an ill bargain to the offender, give him cause to repent, and terrify others from doing the like" (John Locke, Second Treatise of Government, II, §12, p. 122). But, Locke argued that if an individual is directly threatened, the individual can justly kill a dangerous predator. Locke wrote: "This makes is lawful for a man to kill a thief who has not in the least hurt him, nor declared any design upon his life ... because using force, where he has no right to get me into his power, let his pretence be what it will, I have not reason to suppose that he who would take away my liberty would not, when he had me in his power, take away everything else" (ibid. III, §18, p. 126).
Also, Locke’s theory of crime and punishment overcame the Hobbesian tension between the individual and the sovereign. Because the criminal is a dangerous individual who, by his use of force, has violated the law of nature, the criminal has lost his ability to appeal to the right of self-preservation: the criminal has no ground upon which to legitimately resist the punishment imposed by the sovereign. Locke, then, avoided Hobbes’s antinomy between the rights of the individual and the rights of the sovereign by dividing life into two different spheres: there is a rational, human life, and there is an irrational, savage life. This division of life into two spheres effectively severed Hobbes’s connection between “the rights of life” and “biological existence”, which allowed Locke to argue, unlike Hobbes, that in certain conditions governments had an uncontestable right to destroy the life of the individual. An individual who followed the law of nature could appeal to the right to self-preservation against the sovereign right to inflict death, but the dangerous individual who violated the law of nature could and should be destroyed. Making congruent the right to self-preservation and the sovereign’s uncontested right to inflict death was a crucial step in the development of the relationship between life and political power. Life was no longer the general category

12 An important corollary of this new understanding of life was the movement away from Hobbes’s language of authorization to the language of legitimacy. One of the legalistic claims made by Hobbes was that political power could never attack life with authority because individuals could not authorize such a use of political power. With Locke such a claim is rendered facile. Governments are guided by the legitimate use of power, and the rules of legitimacy are procedural rules linked to the law of nature rather than to the rights of the individual. The language of legitimacy, then, moved the ground of government away from individual rights toward a more general and abstract foundation.

13 Locke did argue that, in certain cases, the sovereign had an uncontested right to inflict death upon an individual who has not committed a crime. The sovereign, Locke argued, has an absolute (but not arbitrary) right to life and death in matters of war. Locke wrote: “For the preservation of the army, and in it the whole commonwealth, requires an absolute obedience to the command of every superior officer, and it is justly death to disobey or dispute the most dangerous or unreasonable of them: but yet we see that neither the Sargent that would command a soldier to march up to the mouth of a cannon, or stand in a breach where he is almost sure to perish, can command that soldier to give him one penny of his money; nor the general, that can condemn him to death for deserting his post, or for not obeying the most desperate of orders, can yet, with all his absolute power of life and death, dispose of one farthing of that soldier’s estate, or seize one jot of his goods; whom yet he can command anything, and hang for the least disobedience. Because such a blind obedience is necessary to that end for which the commander has his power, viz. the preservation of the rest; but the disposing of his goods has nothing to do with it” (Second Treatise of Government. XI, §139, pp. 188-189).
Hobbes applied to all individuals by virtue of their biology. Life was instead sub-divided into the human and the bestial, and the individual's way of life—human or bestial—determined his particular relationship with political power. Those who live a human way of life cannot (in normal circumstances) become the legitimate targets of the sovereign’s right to inflict death. The sovereign, however, not only has a right but also a duty to inflict death on the most savage of wild beasts to defend both the state and humanity as a whole.

The radicalization of Hobbes’s concept of life, then, involved dividing life on a continuum—from human to inhuman forms of life. Most significantly, the determination of where an individual fits on this continuum was to be made by the government. The government, through its legislative function, outlines the conditions that must be fulfilled if one is to qualify as a rational human who can claim the right to self-preservation. Perhaps the most frightening development of this logic can be seen in Rousseau’s statement: “life is not only a kindness of nature, but a conditional gift of the state”.14 As a kindness of nature, life is biological existence, but as a conditional gift of the state, life is a politicized continuum. The gift of life is bestowed by the state only as long as the individual lives up to the standards of a fully human life. What is most interesting in Locke’s and Rousseau’s radicalization of Hobbes’s understanding of life is that neither Locke nor Rousseau rejected Hobbes’s description of the goal of sovereign power. The goal of government was, much like Hobbes argued, self-preservation. Locke, sounding like Hobbes, explained government was formed because individuals “unite for the mutual preservation of their lives, liberties and estates, which I call by the general name—property. The great and chief end ... of men ... putting

---

14Jean-Jacques Rousseau. On the Social Contract. II, V, p. 159. Rousseau also that “every malefactor who attacks the social right becomes through his transgressions a rebel and a traitor to the homeland; in violating its laws, he ceases to be a member, and he even wages war with it. In that case the preservation of the state is incompatible with his own. ... The legal proceeding and the judgement are the proofs and the declaration that he has broken the social treaty ... [and] he ought to be removed from it by exile as a violator of the compact, or by death as a public enemy. For such an enemy is not a moral person, but a man, and in this situation the right of war is to kill the vanquished” (ibid. II, V, pp. 159-160).
themselves under government, is the preservation of their property".\(^{15}\) Rousseau, sounding like Hobbes and Locke, asked and answered: "What is the goal of the political association? It is the preservation and prosperity of its members".\(^{16}\) By dividing life along a continuum, however, Locke and Rousseau were able to avoid Hobbes's idea of the suspension of obligation and his antinomy of rights raised by the death penalty. The government, in killing the dangerous individual, is indeed pursuing the preservation of life; the dangerous individual has declared war on, and represents a threat to, the preservation of the body politic and humanity as a whole. The death of the dangerous individual is carried out in the name of protecting the life of humanity.

INTRODUCING BENTHAM

Bentham stood within the tradition of Locke's radicalized definition of life, and he accepted that life should be divided along a continuum. But Bentham did not follow Locke's use of the continuum of life to justify the death of the individual. Even though there are different types of life, and even though there are dangerous individuals who threaten humanity as a whole, Bentham believed he could demonstrate that the death penalty, no matter its theoretical justification, always contradicted the goal of government. This belief established a strange parallel between Hobbes and Bentham. Hobbes argued the sovereign had the right to impose the death penalty even though the individual had the right to resist such punishment. Hobbes, rather than declaring that the sovereign should not impose the death penalty, boldly advanced an antinomy of rights at the very heart of the commonwealth. Bentham accepted the radicalized definition of life that would have allowed him, following Locke, to support the death penalty without falling into the Hobbesian antinomy. However, Bentham chose not to support the death penalty and, in fact, argued for its abolition. Bentham's argument against the death penalty was not a theoretical argument but a practical one; the death penalty was,


Bentham insisted, inefficient and counter-productive. The death penalty, Bentham explained, (i) fails to deter crime, (ii) is applied even when it far outweighs the consequences of the crime, and (iii) in its severity, tends to weaken people's loyalty to the law (W4, pp. 441-450, pp. 525-532). Bentham, then, rejected the death penalty out of prudential rather than theoretical concerns; theoretically, the government has the right to impose such a penalty, but in practice this penalty causes more problems than it solves.

Bentham was not content to simply argue against the death penalty; he also attempted to provide an alternative, and his alternative was his contribution to the radicalization of Hobbes's understanding of life. Locke, as we have seen, overcame the Hobbesian antinomy by declaring that life was a continuum of the human to the bestial. Bentham modified Locke's presentation of how the bestial life should be treated by the state by turning to the study of physiology. Bentham argued his own investigation of physiology had led him to discover a new type of power. To understand the physiological dynamics of life was, Bentham claimed, to open the possibility of manipulating these dynamics. And, Bentham suggested, the power to manipulate the dynamics of life made possible the development of technologies that could be used to domesticate the dangerous individual. Bentham offered this possibility of domestication as his alternative to the death penalty. The dangerous individual no longer had to be killed to protect humanity because, through the use of technologies that manipulated the dynamics of life, the dangerous individual could be transformed into a productive member of society. Rhetorically, Locke had justified the death of the dangerous individual by likening him to a wild, savage beast such as a lion. But, Bentham claimed, to liken criminals to a savage beast such as a lion, "does not seem so well imagined as it might be" (W4, p. 32). Criminals are indeed like beasts, but beasts who can be broken and domesticated by the proper technologies and criminals should be represented as such. Bentham continued: "Let me not be accused of trifling: those who know mankind, know to what a degree the imagination of the multitude is liable to be influenced by circumstances as trivial as these" (W4, p. 32). Bentham thought that his new form of power,
by making the domestication of the criminal possible, rendered the image of the criminal as a lion obsolete; the dangerous individual can now be reclaimed. And, Bentham suggested, this reclamation should be pursued because it is in the interest of society as a whole. To reclaim rather than destroy the criminal was to increase society’s productivity. Because a criminal could now be transformed into a productive member of society, to destroy the criminal was to destroy an individual who could, in principle, contribute to society’s well-being. The dangerous individual was no longer to be represented as an enemy of society, but as a potential friend.
Chapter 3
The Delicate Art of Pleasure and Pain

THE FRENCH ENLIGHTENMENT’S DREAM

The roots of Bentham’s radicalization of Hobbes can be found in the French Enlightenment. One aspect of the French Enlightenment was the attempt to develop a completely materialistic account of human behaviour. This effort is often viewed as a response to the problems of Cartesian dualism, but it can also be seen as a continuation of Hobbes’s own materialist project. The French materialists followed Hobbes’s argument that the human being is matter in motion regulated by pleasure and pain. The French materialists also agreed with Hobbes’s claim that ideas are the products of sensation. Hobbes, however, would not have recognized the conclusions the French materialists drew from these arguments; the French Enlightenment, though it employed many of Hobbes’s concepts, built a materialism much more radical than that of Hobbes. The French materialists concluded that, having outlined the basic principles of human motion, it was possible to build a science rigorous enough to provide a detailed blueprint of the individual. According to Hobbes, the science of human motion was a description not of “this, or that particular man” but of “Man-kind” (Lev, Introduction, p. 83). The individual, Hobbes claimed, was, “legible only to him that searcheth hearts”, a task beyond the scope of science (Lev, Introduction, p. 83). The French materialists, however, did not see Hobbes’s injunction against making the individual the object of science as a valid methodological principle, but as proof of the rudimentary state of

---

1English philosophy featured prominently in the development of the French Enlightenment. While Locke’s *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* was the English text most often cited by the French materialists, Hobbes’s presence was also felt. Perhaps the most famous example of an Enlightenment reading of Hobbes is Diderot’s article in the *Encyclopædia*. It is also worth noting that while the French materialists cited Locke, they almost universally rejected Locke’s suggestion that ideas might be caused by something other than sensation. The materialists, in this respect, were thoroughly Hobbesian, enthusiastically embracing Hobbes’s argument that *all* ideas are the product of sensation.
Hobbes’s science of human motion. Conceptualizing the basic mechanics of human motion, the materialists claimed, made it possible to understand not only the general mechanics of human behaviour, but also, at least in principle, the singularities of the individual. All that was needed to make the individual into an object of science was an exhaustive account of the constitution of the human machine.

The desire to make the individual the object of scientific investigation led the French materialists in two directions—one scientific, one moral. Scientifically, there was the monumental task of compiling an encyclopedic account of the dynamics of sensation and the dynamics of pleasure and pain. Morally, there was the equally monumental task of explaining how the scientific account of the individual could be used to develop and enforce standards of morality. These two tasks were viewed as intimately related, and there was no strict separation between scientific and moral works. For example, though Condillac’s *Treatise on Sensations* is more scientifically inclined, it also highlights the moral implications of his claims; and though Helvétius’s *On Man* is a moral treatise, it also comments on the scientific foundation of morality. The works of the French materialists all revolved around the basic premise that to grasp the mechanics of human behaviour in their totality was the key to a scientific understanding of human behaviour and, thus, to a scientific understanding of morality. Sensation was the crux of the scientific and moral project of the French Enlightenment. Sensation was put forward as the origin of all ideas. To grasp the process of sensation, then, was to understand exactly how individuals form their ideas. If the formation of ideas could be understood, then it would become possible to develop techniques by which the individual could be implanted with ideas. At the heart of the materialism of the French Enlightenment was the belief that once the process of sensation was fully revealed, it would become possible to develop entirely new ways of controlling human behaviour.

This belief of the French materialists found its highest expression in their claims about the power of education. The materialists argued that their scientific account of sensation could be used to develop effective, indeed almost infallible, forms of education.
The materialists believed a system of education built around the science and the manipulation of sensation was the answer to the age-old question: 'can virtue be taught?' Virtue can indeed be taught, the materialists replied, by orchestrating sensation such that the individual was informed by the proper, socially constructive ideas about pleasure and pain. In the ideal case, education would begin in childhood, before ideas about pleasure and pain have become too sophisticated. Sensation would be manipulated so that by the time the child was an adult, his ideas about pleasure and pain would correspond to those of the wider society. Even if Hobbes was right to assert that there is no natural harmony between different individuals' ideas about pleasure and pain, the French materialists claimed that given the science of sensation and the power of education, the sword of an absolute sovereign was no longer the only way to achieve social harmony. A properly constructed and universal system of education would make possible the formation of a community of pleasure and pain that did not rely on a Leviathan. An individual whose ideas about pleasure and pain have been carefully cultivated is an individual whose motion necessarily accords with society as a whole; a properly educated individual will not have to be inspired by fear to do the right thing. This celebration of the power of an education based on sensation highlighted the political dream of the French materialists: the possibility of manipulating the process of sensation promised the ability to abolish absolutism and still build of a perfect society populated by individuals who, because properly educated, would be self-governing.

Bentham was inspired by this dream of the French materialists, and, by his own admission, his political theory owed much to the French Enlightenment. In fact, Bentham was so captivated by the French materialists' description of the process of sensation that his materialism is largely derivative; though he did attempt to offer his own encyclopedic codification of the mechanics of sensation, it did not add much of importance to what had already been written. While Bentham did not really contribute to the scientific account of sensation, he did make a significant contribution toward advancing the materialists's dream. Bentham's contribution was related to his tenacious attempt to use the science of sensation to
develop new legal and moral theories. Bentham used the new science of sensation to agitate against what he saw as the "fictions"—i.e., unscientific concepts—upon which the legal system and moral doctrines were grounded. Bentham wanted to use the science of sensation to replace these fictions with new legal and moral theories that represented more rational and humane ways of organizing society. Bentham was particularly interested in the reformation of the system of criminal law and punishment, and he insisted that the science of sensation was particularly suited to bring about such reform. Crime, Bentham explained, was perhaps the most difficult moral problem. The criminal, through his actions, demonstrates a rejection of the moral code that binds society. Not only does the criminal reject society's moral code, but the criminal is also willing to do harm to others. These qualities, Bentham suggested, made the criminal the perfect material for an experiment to determine whether the French materialists's claims about human nature were correct. Bentham took it upon himself to conduct such an experiment, attempting to use the science of sensation to arrive at a complete account of why individuals engage in criminal behaviour and to speculate about techniques that could be used to reform the criminal. In this respect, the criminal stood at the heart of Bentham's attempt to prove that the science of sensation could be used as a vehicle for the reformation of society as a whole.

SHAPING PLEASURE AND PAIN

One of Bentham's most intriguing but often ridiculed ideas is his felicific calculus. Bentham argued that pleasures and pains could be quantified and, once quantified, compared using the felicific calculus. This claim has often been quickly dismissed. For example, H.L.A. Hart brushed it aside, calling it "absurd" (IPML, xcvii). But such quick dismissals of Bentham's calculus often miss its point. The significance of Bentham's calculus is not its scientific merit or lack thereof, but its function within Bentham's political theory. In fact, though Bentham sometimes spoke of his calculus as a scientific formula—a fact most commentators centre on—he also argued it was more of a thought-experiment than a mathematical formula. Bentham noted that adding and comparing one individual's pleasures and pains with those of
another individual was like adding twenty apples and twenty pears, "which after you had done that could not be forty of any one thing but twenty of each just as there was before". The comparison of pleasures and pains is, strictly speaking, impossible. This impossibility does not render the felicific calculus useless, however. As Bentham explained, "This addibility of the happiness of different subjects, however, when considered rigorously, it may appear fictious, is a postulatum without the allowance of which all political reasoning is at a stand". As a postulatum or as a thought-experiment the felicific calculus is indispensable. To place political reasoning on a rational foundation one must act as if the felicific calculus was an accurate description of reality. Moreover, Bentham argued that political action must, by attempting to transform and shape reality, make the thought-experiment of the felicific calculus as close as possible to an actual description of reality. The goal of legislation was to manipulate individuals so that individuals within the same community would share the same pleasures and pains. If individuals came to share the same pleasures and pains, then the addition and comparison of pleasures and pains would no longer be like the comparison of apples and oranges, but would instead be the comparison of like to like. Bentham intended the felicific calculus not as a scientific formula but as a regulative ideal that could highlight the logic of governing; governing is the art of manipulating individuals to integrate them into a harmonious and ordered community of pleasures and pains.4

---


3Ibid.

4Wesley C. Mitchell noted that Bentham’s felicific calculus functioned as a means of classification rather than calculation. Mitchell wrote: "Bentham did not use the calculus as an instrument of calculation; he used it as a basis of classification. It pointed out to him what elements should be taken into consideration in a given situation, and among these elements seraitim he was often able to make comparisons in terms of greater or less—comparisons that few men would challenge, though Bentham might not be able to prove them against a sceptic. So his science as he elaborated it turned out to be much more like the systematic botany than like the celestial mechanics of his day. Bentham himself was a classifier rather than a calculator; he came nearer to being the Linnaeus than the Newton of the moral world" (Wesley C. Mitchell. "Bentham’s Felicific Calculus" in Jeremy Bentham. Ten Critical Essays. ed. Bhikhu Parekh. p. 182).
Chapter 3: The Delicate Art of Pleasure and Pain

Bentham located pleasure and pain at the heart of politics because he, like Hobbes, believed pleasure and pain determined the direction of human motion. In the first chapter of his *Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation*, Bentham asserted: "Nature has placed mankind under the governance of two sovereign masters, pain and pleasure. It is for them alone to point to what we ought to do, as well as to determine what we shall do" (*IPML*, I, §1, p. 11). As Hobbes had explained, humans move toward the pleasurable and away from the painful. But according to Bentham, Hobbes had overlooked an important consequence of this fact—a consequence Bentham highlighted by introducing the "principle of utility". The principle of utility "approves or disapproves of every action whatsoever, according to the tendency which it appears to have to augment or diminish the happiness of the party whose interest is in question", and it applies not only to "every action of a private individual, but of every measure of government" (*IPML*, I, §2, p. 12). The principle of utility teaches that human motion is not structured by pleasure and pain per se, but by the individual and the collective pursuit of happiness. Individuals act to maximize their happiness, and the task of government is to prohibit and prevent actions that tend to diminish the happiness of the community as a whole. Bentham, to capture more explicitly the role of happiness within his political philosophy, eventually abandoned the phrase "principle of utility" in favour of the "greatest happiness principle". Governments must regulate individual behaviour to produce the "greatest happiness of the greatest number". And, Bentham explained, the felicific

---

5David Lyons argued Bentham's application of the principle of utility was based on a "dual standard": "the interest of the community is sometime to be considered but at other times the interest of the agent alone applies" (David Lyons, *In the Interest of the Governed*, p. xiv). The common link between these two possible applications of the principle of utility is the, "fundamental normative idea ... that government should serve the interests of those being governed" (*ibid.* p. 32). Government, then, can be divided into the governing of others and self-government: serving the interests of the community requires a government that directs the behaviour of individuals according to the interests of these individuals; serving the interests of the "agent alone" takes place though self-government based upon self-interest. Lyons claimed, "We may call this a 'differential' principle because the range of relevant interests to be promoted is not fixed in the usual way; they are neither everyone's nor all those within the agent's community. The interests to be promoted are the interests of those being 'directed' rather than those who may be affected" (*ibid.* p. 32).
calculus was what would allow governments to judge exactly what constitutes the greatest happiness of the greatest number. Good policy and good laws grow out of the comparison of pleasures and pains and the ranking of the relative worth of different pleasures and pains. A healthy body politic, according to Bentham, was not only characterized by peace and order but also by the greatest possible quanta of happiness.

Though Bentham claimed that pleasure and pain were the basis of individual behaviour and the goal of governmental actions, he also argued that pleasure and pain did not look the same from each perspective. From the perspective of the individual, pleasures and pains are "final causes". Individual motion is always motion toward specific objects of pleasure and motion away from specific objects of pain, and these objects thus serve as the end—or final cause—of an individual's behaviour. When viewed from the perspective of the government, however, pleasures and pains are not final causes but "efficient causes" (IPML, III, §1, p. 34). Politically speaking, pleasures and pains should not be viewed as the ends of individual behaviour but as tools to be used to manipulate individual behaviour. Bentham said of the legislator, "Pleasures and pains are the instruments he has to work with: it behoves him therefore to understand their force" (IPML, IV, §1, p. 38). To turn pleasure and pain into instruments for the manipulation of behaviour, Bentham continued, one first had to understand the "sources" of pleasure and pain. In the *Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation*, Bentham identified four sources of pleasure and pain—the physical, the political, the moral, and the religious (see IPML, IV).6 According to Bentham, all pleasures and pains can be traced to one of these four sources, and the legislator can manipulate human behaviour by turning these sources into what Bentham called "sanctions". Bentham explained that each of these sources, "inasmuch as the pleasures and pains belonging to each

6Bentham eventually enlarged this list of sources from four to fourteen. For the purposes of my analysis, however, the list of sources presented in the *Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation* is sufficient. Even though Bentham enlarged his list, his basic understanding of the function of sources and his claim that sources could be turned into sanctions remained identical to his presentation in the *Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation*. 
of them are capable of giving a binding force to any law or rule of conduct, they may all of them be termed sanctions” (IPML, III, §2, p. 34). A sanction is created when the legislator uses a particular source of pleasure and pain to make certain types of behaviour in the interest of individuals. As a simple example, corporeal punishment turns the physical source of pleasure and pain into a sanction—the fear of bodily pain creates an interest in following the law. The art of governing is the use of such sanctions to create a community wherein the behaviour of individuals becomes predictable and calculable.

In describing how governments could use pleasure and pain, Bentham went beyond identifying the sources and sanctions of pleasure and pain. The sources of pleasure and pain, Bentham explained, were too abstract to account for the behaviour of a concrete individual. Though the sources of pleasure and pain might account for the behaviour of humanity as a whole, different individuals react differently to each source of pleasure and pain; certain individuals will be more sensitive to a particular source, and individuals will experience the effects of each source with different levels of intensity. To account for this variety amongst individuals, Bentham moved from the general consideration of the sources of pleasure and pain to the construction of what he called *A Table of the Springs of Action*. This table was Bentham’s attempt to provide a comprehensive outline of the various types of pleasures and pains, along with the different interests and motives that corresponded to these pleasures and pains. Bentham’s *A Table of the Springs of Action* was his attempt to catalogue the specific ways in which *individuals* experience pleasure and pain; pleasure and pain must be conceptualized in their minutest details if the individual is to become the object of scientific knowledge. In his table Bentham began by listing 14 general types of pleasure and pain (one of which was the pains of the body), and then moved to an outline of the interests that corresponded to these general types of pleasure and pain (the pains of the body create the interest of “existence and self-preservation”). He completed the table by detailing how the interests related to each type of pleasure and pain gave rise to neutral, good, and bad motives (the neutral, good, and bad motives corresponding to the pains of the body and the interest of
“existence and self-preservation” are, respectively: self-preservation, prudence, and timidity). In total, Bentham’s table identified over 300 motives associated with the 14 general types of pleasure and pain and their corresponding interests. Bentham thought that this comprehensive outline of the types of pleasures and pains, and the detailing of the interests and the motives associated with these pleasures and pains was a complete description of the human machine.

_A Table of the Springs of Action_, Bentham insisted, could be used to detect the general type of pleasure and pain, as well as the particular interest and the singular motive that was responsible for each and every action of each and every individual. But this table was not simply a diagnostic tool: Bentham claimed that his table could be used in the construction of increasingly sophisticated sanctions. Using _A Table of the Springs of Action_ to discover the interests and motives that underlay an individual’s behaviour was merely the first step toward changing these interests and motives and thereby changing the individual’s behaviour.

To emphasize the importance of _A Table of the Springs of Action_, Bentham, sounding like Hobbes, claimed that in the absence of his table, morality and politics would simply consist of ineffectual words. “Fancy not, nor pretend to fancy,” Bentham cautioned, “that by saying ‘ought’ or ‘ought not’ you can create a duty: no, nor probabilize the fulfilment of one” (_TSP_, p. 64). But Bentham rejected Hobbes’s claim that the sword of an absolute sovereign was the only way to ensure that duty was more than an empty word. What was needed to probabilize the fulfilment of duty, according to Bentham, was a rigorous science of pleasure and pain and an appropriate application of sanctions. Governing was the ability to “create and apply” sanctions because, “what you would have done, make it a man’s _interest_ to do it” (_TSA_, p. 72). Hobbes’s absolute sovereign might indeed be capable of creating an interest in the pursuit of peace and order, but Bentham argued that absolutism was _more_ power than was needed. Hobbes’s absolute sovereign was, in Bentham’s opinion, uneconomical. A skillful creation of sanctions and, more important, their dissemination through the educational system, was, Bentham insisted, enough to ensure that most people will internalize ideas about pleasure and pain that are in harmony with the greatest happiness of the greatest number;
and, in this respect, individuals will, for the most part, govern themselves in accord with the greatest happiness of the greatest number.\(^7\) There will, however, be anomalies—that is, individuals who fail to internalize the proper ideas about pleasure and pain. In part, these anomalies will become criminals who, even if limited in number, will have a profound effect on the body politic. But to turn to an absolute sovereign as the response to crime was, Bentham cautioned, a mistake. Bentham argued that the claim that absolute sovereignty is the only response to the problem of crime was based on the erroneous assumption that all people are potential criminals. If all people are indeed potential criminals, then it is plausible that the fear inspired by the sword of an absolute sovereign is the only way to keep people in line. But if, as Bentham argued, most people most of the time can be taught to orient their lives based on a social understanding of pleasure and pain, then absolute sovereignty is an excessive response to the anti-social behaviour of a small minority.\(^8\) An absolute sovereign, 

\(^7\)Douglas Long noted that for Bentham this idea of governing as manipulation was completely consistent with the notion of a self-governing individual. "Implicitly taking 'government' to mean the controlling of human behaviour by the manipulation of pleasures and pains and thence of human motives," Long wrote, "[Bentham] concluded that 'self-government' ought to mean, not the apotheosis of libertarian individualism, but the subjection of the unassisted individual to the dictates of his own isolated organism, adrift in an unorganized sea of 'inanimate or irrational' sources of sensory stimuli. With such a jaundiced view of the lot of the self-governing individual as a point of comparison, the utility of government was clear to Bentham. Its indispensable function was to be the organization of the hedonistic social environment: the administration of pleasurable and painful things was to be the essence of the government of men" (Douglas G. Long. *Bentham on Liberty*. pp. 211-212). Individuals, then, are self-governing when they pursue pleasure and avoid pain. The task of government is to manipulate pleasure and pain such that the self-governing individual is the same thing as the good citizen.

\(^8\)As we have seen, Hobbes believed people could be persuaded that they should authorize and oblige themselves to a absolute sovereign: in this sense, people can be persuaded that their individual desires should be subordinated to the requirements of peace. Hobbes's notion of persuasion, however, is quite different than Bentham's idea of education. For Hobbes, it is not only those who remain unpersuaded (i.e., the fool) who are potential criminals. Those who have been persuaded about the necessity of government will also commit crime because the intensity of desire will at times cause an individual to forget the lessons of the state of nature. Persuasion, then, is in constant tension with the dynamics of human motion, and this permanent tension necessitates the sword of an absolute sovereign to remind the individual to pursue peace. Bentham's idea of education is of a completely different order. Bentham believed that education could be used to "program" individuals (I will outline how this is accomplished in the next chapter). A properly educated individual is an individual who will habitually respond to specific object of pleasure and specific objects of pain. The particular pleasures and pains of Bentham's educated individual, unlike Hobbes's persuaded individual, will never lead to a conflict between the individual and the community; a scientific system of education can accomplish what
then, is by no means the only, or even the most effective political response to the problem of crime. Bentham put forward his own suggestion about an appropriate political power, which was much more limited in its range and concentrated in its scope than an absolute sovereign and which he believed offered a much more efficient way of responding to and solving the problem of crime.

CRIME AND THE TOOLS OF POLITICS

Bentham considered crime to be the basic political problem, defining it as acts that tend to diminish the happiness of the community as a whole. In this respect, Bentham understood the problem of crime slightly differently than did Hobbes. For Hobbes crime was a political problem because it introduces the psychological anxiety of the state of nature into the commonwealth; crime causes individuals to mistrust one another and this mistrust sparks a race for power that undermines the social covenant. Bentham, on the other hand, did not connect crime to the disintegration of the state but to the diminution of happiness. Bentham thought this definition of crime represented a new, scientific understanding of crime that could sweep away older, irrational theories of crime and punishment. "Any act may be an offence," Bentham wrote, "which they whom the community are in the habit of obeying shall be pleased to make one: that is, any act which they shall be pleased to prohibit or to punish. But, upon the principle of utility, such acts alone ought to be made offences, as the good of the community requires should be made so" (IPML, XVI, §I, p. 188). In other words, those with political power can choose to criminalize any act, but only those acts that diminish the happiness of the community as a whole should be criminalized. Criminal law, Bentham insisted, should not be based upon opinions or sentiments about morality. Instead, criminal law should be based upon a rigorous determination of the happiness of the community as a whole, arrived at by using the felicific calculus. "The general object which all laws have, or

Hobbes thought impossible—human community replicating the communities of bees and ants. For Bentham, then, the presence of the criminal within the community should not be seen as a brute fact of human nature but as an exception that proves the rule.
ought to have, in common,” Bentham explained, “is to augment the total happiness of the community; and therefore, in the first place, to exclude, as far as may be, every thing that tends to subtract from that happiness: in other words, to exclude mischief” (IPML, XIII, §1, p. 158). A truly objective criminal law, then, would only criminalize “mischief”, or those acts that subtract from the greatest happiness of the greatest number. Any other definition of crime would be based upon a misunderstanding of human nature and the true goal of political power.

The true object of criminal law is the defence of the greatest possible happiness of the greatest number. Punishment was the weapon to be used in this defence and, just as he attempted to place criminal law on an objective foundation, Bentham attempted to place punishment on an objective foundation. The first, somewhat surprising principle of Bentham’s science of punishment was that, like crime itself, punishment diminishes the happiness of the community. “[A]ll punishment,” Bentham argued, “is mischief: all punishment in itself is evil. Upon the principle of utility, if it ought at all to be admitted, it ought only to be admitted in as far as it promises to exclude some greater evil” (IPML, XIII, §2, p. 158). Punishment consists of the infliction of pain. Pain diminishes happiness. Therefore punishment contradicts the goal of government, which is the promotion of the greatest possible happiness of the greatest number.⁹ Punishment can only, according to Bentham, be justified as a necessary evil. The evil of punishment is justified only because punishment serves to deter crime and thereby prevent a greater evil. Bentham insisted: “The

⁹David Lyons wrote: “The pain imposed by way of punishment always counts against imposing it; no type of pain or suffering may be discounted. Likewise, no pleasure may be discounted—not even the sadistic pleasure that one may secure by deliberately hurting another. ... But it should be observed that Bentham makes some reassuring assumptions. He reasons, for example, that sadistic pleasures necessarily involve someone’s pain, and then assumes (without justification) that the pains due to malevolence always far exceed the pleasures. This enables him to conclude that malevolent action could never be justified on the ground of its utility (by bringing more pleasure to the sadist, say, than pain to his victim)” (David Lyons, In the Interest of the Governed, p. 23).
immediate principle end of punishment is to control action. This action is either that of the offender, or of others” (IPML, XIII, §2, p. 158). Bentham argued that if punishment is to control actions, punishment must always inflict an amount of pain “sufficient to outweigh that of the profit of the offence” (IPML, XIV, §8, p. 166). But herein lies the evil of punishment. To control behaviour and deter crime, the pain of punishment must outweigh the pleasure of crime. To be effective, then, punishment must produce a “surplus” of pain. Because governments are in the business of producing surplus happiness not surplus pain, governments must, Bentham argued, adhere to a strict economy in matters of punishment. The most economic system of punishment is one that uses the minimum quanta of pain required to make crime unprofitable. But while the idea of the minimum quanta of pain minimizes the surplus of pain produced by punishment it does not eliminate it; and Bentham was not satisfied with merely minimizing the surplus of pain. Instead, Bentham attempted to prove that his A Table of the Springs of Action and the science of pleasure and pain made possible an ideal system of punishment—one that would effectively control behaviour without having to rely on producing a surplus of pain.

To explain his ideal system of punishment, Bentham made two important distinctions. The first was a distinction between reformation and incapacitation, a distinction that relates to the way punishment can prevent crime. Bentham argued: “There are two methods by which this end may be obtained: the one by correcting the will; the other by taking away the power to injure. ... To take away from an offender the will to offend again, is to reform him: to take away the power of offending is to incapacitate him” (WI, p. 367). Reformation attempts to change behaviour by transforming a criminal’s mind, while incapacitation attempts to change behaviour by manipulating a criminal’s body (through either
imprisonment or mutilation). Bentham’s ideal system of punishment favoured reform and placed incapacitation, if and when necessary, in a position subservient to reformation because he wanted to find a way to reintegrate reformed criminals into the wider community. To simply incapacitate criminals in prison without reforming their wills ensures that prisons are little more than “schools of crime” (WI, p. 404), and the use of more severe forms of physical incapacitation only serve to harm the community as a whole because, as Bentham wrote, “the power of doing evil is inseparable from the power of doing good. When the hands are cut off, a man can hardly steal; but also he can hardly work” (WI, p. 535). Incapacitation, then, should not be seen as an end in itself but as a means of facilitating reformation: incapacitation alone cannot render the criminal willing to adopt a proper way of life, and, in its more severe forms, incapacitation even prevents the criminal from ever fulfilling his full potential.10 Alongside the incapacitation/reform distinction, Bentham made a second important distinction between what he called direct and indirect legislation.11 Direct legislation was concerned with the use of corporeal punishment to deter crime, while indirect legislation was the attempt to prevent crime by influencing the mind of the criminal.12

---

10Bentham argued that imprisonment was the form of incapacitation most suited to the task of reformation. In his opinion, imprisonment served reformation because while it incapacitated the individual it did not have permanent physical effects and, if institutions of imprisonment are properly structured, they are not “schools of crime” but schools of socialization and reformation. As I will outline in the following chapter, Bentham offered the technology of the Panopticon as an institution of imprisonment organized around the attempt to reform the prisoner.

11For a more detailed, and quite interesting discussion of Bentham’s idea of indirect legislation, see Chapter 8 of Douglas Long’s Bentham on Liberty.

12Bentham comes close to articulating a theory of crime that allows an individual to be labelled a criminal before committing a crime. A criminal is not only an individual who has violated the law but also an individual with a criminal disposition, that is a high degree of sensitivity to the pleasures of crime. Bentham’s ideal system of punishment attempts to control the behaviour of both types of criminals and, in this respect, indirect legislation is targeted at individuals who have committed a crime and individuals who have not committed a crime but who are likely to do so because of their dispositions. I discuss Bentham’s idea of disposition in the following chapter.
Bentham compared direct legislation to open warfare against crime and indirect legislation to a propaganda campaign designed to transform opinions (WJ, p. 535). The major difference between these two forms of legislation was, according to Bentham, that direct legislation always involves the actual infliction of pain whereas indirect legislation can, if properly instituted, be effective without having to rely on the infliction of pain. Indirect legislation, though part of the system of criminal justice, is really a form of education rather than a form of punishment. Indirect legislation, like reformation, targets the criminal’s mind, while direct legislation, like incapacitation, targets the criminal’s body; and, Bentham argued, direct legislation should only be used to support indirect legislation. Bentham’s ideal system of punishment was one wherein the pursuit of reformation through indirect legislation could, at least in principle, eliminate the surplus of pain produced by punishment. The criminal was not to be punished but educated, and this process of education would allow the reformed criminal to become a productive member of society.

Bentham, then, set about to create a system of punishment that relied on the use of indirect legislation to reform the criminal. In this system, the criminal’s mind, not his body, was the object of punishment. This system, Bentham hoped, would overcome the two major sources of the surplus of pain produced by punishment: it would avoid any permanent damage that may be caused by the techniques of incapacitation; and it would not rely on corporeal pain to transform the criminal’s mind. Bentham’s ideal system of punishment could thus bring about the transformation of the criminal without any pain. To accomplish this, punishment would have to become education through the manipulation of sensation.13

13David Lyons argued that Bentham also understood the law in terms of education. Lyons explained: “But Bentham’s full conception of the law does not simply label behaviour ‘lawful’ or ‘unlawful’. ... Bentham conceives of the law as a system of social control. What is meant by social control is not direct manipulation by means of chains, walls, bars, drugs, or other such devices. These may be used
Here, Bentham adopted and modified one of Hobbes's claims about crime and punishment. For Hobbes, punishment was seen as an ancillary to education; the goal of punishment was to remind the individual of the horrors of the state of nature. For Bentham, however, punishment was not simply an ancillary to education but was to become a form of education. The criminal must be subjected to a system that can implant within his mind the ideas about pleasure and pain that most people have absorbed unconsciously. Punishment should not approach the criminal as an enemy, but as an individual in need of reorientation; and Bentham offered the Panopticon as the model of an institution within which this reorientation would become a possibility. The organization of Bentham's Panopticon was centred upon his notion of an ideal system of punishment, which attempted to make sure that the criminal's mind became the sole object of a punishment designed to bring about reformation.

---

by the law, but they do not fully explain the mode of control in question, which is getting people to behave in certain ways by affecting their own self-control through the use of rules and guidelines for them to follow. ... How is control effected by means of such rules? Bentham's answer is that motivation must be supplied. In some cases pre-existing motivation can be exploited; but motivation is in any case relied upon” (David Lyons, In the interest of the Governed. p. 131).
4
Education Within the Panopticon

THE PANOPTIC PRINCIPLE

While Bentham’s Panopticon is usually thought of as a prison, Bentham believed the principles of the Panopticon could be extended beyond prisons. Bentham opened his Panopticon Letters with the claim: “Morals reformed—health preserved—industry invigorated—instruction diffused—public burthens lightened—Economy seated, as it were, upon a rock—the gordian knot of the Poor Laws not cut, but untied—all by a simple idea in Architecture!” (Pan, Preface, p. 39). Bentham argued the architectural principles of the Panopticon could be applied to everything from prisons, schools, poor houses, and factories; these principles were not a blueprint for a particular type of institution, but a blueprint for “a new mode of obtaining power of mind over mind, in a quantity hitherto without example” (Pan, Preface, p. 39). Bentham distinguished the power of mind over mind from the power of body over body. The power of body over body is, Bentham asserted, fundamentally uneconomical. To attack the body is to produce the surplus of pain outlined in the previous chapter, and the power of body over body cannot guarantee, and perhaps even mitigates against, reformation. The power of body over body is, Bentham insisted, the most blunt, thoughtless form of power. “[A] trigger,” Bentham argued, “is scarce pulled before the breath may be driven out of a refractory body; but to purify a corrupted heart ... is an operation not quite so simple or so sure” (W4, p. 175). The power of mind over mind is the tool to be used in the difficult operation of purifying the corrupted heart. Bentham’s new power of mind over mind did not rely on the direct application of force, but it aimed to reform the criminal by manipulating sensation; the criminal’s senses were to be bombarded in the effort to erase his criminal ideas and to replace them with more socially acceptable ones. In the Panopticon, the criminal is not to be treated as a refractory body to be beaten into submission, but as an
individual whose actions are the result of certain wrong ideas about pleasure and pain, and as an individual who will act differently if and when these ideas are transformed.

The idea at the heart of Bentham's Panopticon is deceptively simple. All that is required to bring about a new power of mind over mind is a lack of symmetry between what those who exercise power can see and what those who are subjected to power can see. Those who exercise power must, at least in principle, be able to see and inspect the entire Panopticon and everyone in it at each and every moment; those who are subjected to power, on the other hand, must not be able to see those who are carrying out this inspection. The prisoners must always be visible to the inspectors, and the inspectors must always be invisible to the prisoners. The Panopticon was to bring about this lack of symmetry through what Bentham called a "simple idea in Architecture". In its most basic structure, the Panopticon consists of a circular building enclosing an inner courtyard with a tower in the middle of the courtyard. The circular building is divided into the prisoner's cells; the tower in the middle contains, at its centre, the "inspection lodge" from which the "head keeper" can survey the entire Panopticon, and, on its periphery, a series of "inspections galleries" from which individual guards can observe, at closer proximity, limited portions of the Panopticon.\(^1\)

To facilitate the visibility of the prisoners, each of the cells has a window on its outer and

---

\(^1\)Bentham placed great importance on the distinction between the inspection lodge and the inspection galleries. The relation between the inspection lodge and inspection galleries mirrors that between the guard tower and the cells. The "head keeper" or warden of the prison occupies the inspection lodge, while "under keepers" occupy the inspection galleries. Those in the inspection galleries cannot see into the inspection lodge and this, Bentham suggests, "presents an answer, and that a satisfactory one, to one of the most puzzling of political questions—*quis custodiet ipsos custodes?*" (*Pan*, VI, p. 45). Like the prisoners, the under keepers can and should be observed at all times to prevent the abuse of power. "On the common plans," Bentham wrote, "what means, what possibility, has the prisoner, of appealing to the humanity of the principle for redress against the neglect or oppression of subordinates in that ridged sphere, but the few opportunity which, in a crowded prison, the most conscientious keeper can afford—but the none at all which many a keeper thinks fit to give them?" (*Pan*, VI, p. 45). Not only can subordinates use the crowded, irrational order of common prisons to conceal their own acts of injustice, but the continued efficacy of corporeal power actually precludes the punishment of each and every act of injustice committed by the guards. In the Panopticon, however, not only are the guards' transgressions always visible, but they can also be punished without the knowledge of the prisoners.
inner walls to ensure that the prisoners are always bathed in light. To facilitate the invisibility of the guards, the inspection lodge and the inspection galleries are shielded by a combination of slits and blinds that are angled to allow the inspectors to see out into the prisoner's cells, while at the same time preventing the prisoners from seeing into the guard tower. These architectural features ensure that, from the point of view of the tower the cells are transparent, while, from the point of view of the cells the tower is opaque. This combination of transparency and opacity means that the prisoners can never determine if and when they are being observed—ensuring that at no time can any prisoner assume he is not being watched. This assumption would give rise to a belief in the, "apparent omnipresence of the inspector" (Pan, VI, p. 45). But, Bentham insisted, the Panopticon cannot rest upon this assumption. "What is also of importance is," Bentham explained, "that for the greatest proportion of time possible, each man should actually be under inspection" (Pan, V, p. 44). The circularity of the Panopticon facilitates the actual, rather than apparent omnipresence of the inspector. The circularity of the Panopticon, "affords a spot from which, without any change of situation, a man may survey, in the same perfection, the whole number, and without so much as a change in posture, the half of the whole number, at the same time" (Pan, V, p. 44). The architecture of the Panopticon is designed to create within each prisoner's mind the belief that he is being observed at all times and to supplement this belief by ensuring that each prisoner is actually observed for the "greatest proportion of time possible". This omnipresent inspection is the foundation of power that will control the

2 This is only the most general outline of the Panopticon, and fails to capture the work Bentham put into developing of the Panopticon. For example, Bentham attempted to calculate the depth and width each cell would have to be to ensure that the prisoner could not retreat into a corner to evade the gaze of the guards. Also, it is not just the general structure of the Panopticon that was to be organized around visibility and invisibility. Among other things, Bentham's attention to the inner structure of the Panopticon extended to the networks of corridors and stairways which ran through the Panopticon. Bentham wanted to organize these networks such that coincidental contact between prisoners would be eliminated.

3 "[T]here ought not anywhere to be," Bentham argued, "a single foot square, on which man or boy shall be able to plant himself ... under any assurance of not being observed. Leave but a single spot thus unguarded, that spot will be sure to be a lurking-place for the most reprobate of the prisoners,
behaviour of the inmates with an efficacy never before possible. "Upon all plans hitherto pursued," Bentham wrote, "the thickest walls have been found occasionally unavailing: upon this plan, the thinnest would be sufficient" (Pan, VII, p. 46).

Even though Bentham focused upon inspection when discussing the architectural arrangements of the Panopticon, inspection was not the Panopticon’s only goal. Bentham’s discussion of the "inspection principle" concentrated on the use of inspection as a means of controlling individual behaviour. But Bentham did not only see the Panopticon though the eyes of the inspectors. The Panopticon was not designed simply to control behaviour but also to reform behaviour. And when Bentham turned to the discussion of reformation, he attempted to see the Panopticon through the eyes of the prisoner. In this respect, the architecture of the Panopticon was not build around the inspection principle alone; it was also built around the theories of the Enlightenment materialists. As I outlined in Chapter 3, the Enlightenment materialists argued that ideas are the products of sensation, and as such, it followed that ideas can be produced through a careful and meticulous manipulation of sensation. In fact, given the proper control of sensation, it stands to reason that all people should be equally amenable to the effects of education. Thus, the interior of the Panopticon must be, Bentham claimed, a space within which the total control of sensation could be accomplished. Bentham was so confident that his Panopticon would make possible such a total control of sensation that he described the Panopticon as, "a rare field for discovery in metaphysics: a science which, now for the first time, may be put to the test of experiment, like any other" (Pan, XXI, p. 65). The Panopticon was to be the laboratory within which the theories of the Enlightenment materialists would be put to the test. If the Enlightenment materialists were correct about the mechanics of sensation and the role of sensation in the

and the scene of all sorts of forbidden practices" (PP, I, IX, p. 86). But though Bentham continually refined the architecture of the Panopticon to make the guards all-seeing (for an account of these refinements, see Chapter 5 of Robin Evans’ s The fabrication of virtue), he realized it was practically impossible to ensure that the guards would see everything that occurred within the Panopticon. It was because of this practical impossibility that Bentham concentrated on techniques that would force the prisoners to imagine that at no time could they assume they were not being watched.
Part 2: Bentham

formation of ideas, then the Panopticon should make possible the total reformation of the criminal will.

ALTERING DISPOSITION

Like Hobbes, Bentham advocated a peculiar understanding of the will. Hobbes had argued that all human action had its roots in ideas about pleasure and pain. Thus, the human will, according to Hobbes, was nothing more than the expression of an individual’s judgements about the particular actions that seem most likely to produce pleasure or to avoid pain. As Hobbes put it, an individual deliberates about pleasure and pain and, “In Deliberation, the last Appetite, or Aversion, immediately adhæring to the action, or the omission thereof, is that wee call the Will; the Act, (not the faculty,) of Willing” (Lev, I, VI, p. 127). Hobbes concluded that “though we say in common Discourse, a man had a Will once to do a thing, that nevertheless he forbore to do; yet that is properly but an Inclination” (Lev, I, VI, p. 128). Bentham adopted Hobbes’s position. Humans are animated by considerations about pleasure and pain. Action is not generated by a faculty such as the will, but by the strict necessity of moving toward pleasure and away from pain. With this strict necessity in mind Bentham’s discussion of human behaviour and, in particular, criminal behaviour, did not focus on the will, but on what Bentham called “disposition”. “Now disposition,” Bentham explained, “is a kind of fictitious entity, feigned for the convenience of discourse, in order to express what there is supposed to be permanent in a man’s frame of mind, where, on such or such an occasion, he has been influenced by such or such motive, to engage in an act, which, as it appeared to him, was of such or such tendency” (IPML, XI, §1, p. 125). Bentham argued that what is permanent in a “man’s frame of mind” is his “degree of sensibility” to certain types of pleasure and pain; or, as Bentham wrote, “the nature of a man’s disposition must depend upon the nature of the motives he is apt to be influenced by” (IPML, XI, §27, p. 134). Following this logic, an individual with a high degree of sensibility to the pleasures of crime can be said to possess a criminal disposition. Bentham, however, moved beyond such a general claim. He argued that the commission of a criminal act depended on an individual’s
judgement about the relative weight of "seducing" and "tutelary" motives. Seducing motives are the pleasures promised by the criminal act, whereas tutelary motives are the pleasures (i.e., the pleasures of good reputation) and pains (i.e., the pains of punishment) that mitigate against the act.\footnote{Bentham used this reasoning to develop a measure of an individual’s depravity. One can view the "force" of the temptation that moved the criminal as a ratio of the pleasures promised by the act and the trouble/danger that accompanies the act. A temptation is strong when the promised pleasures far outweigh the trouble/danger, and weak when the promised pleasures are "small in comparison" to the trouble/danger. "It appears, then," Bentham reasoned, "that the weaker a temptation is, by which a man has been overcome, the more depraved and mischievous it shows his disposition to have been" (IPML, XI, XLI, p. 148). In other words, if the pleasure of a crime is a constant, an individual is more or less depraved depending upon the degree of risk needed to dissuade him from acting.} An individual who possesses a criminal disposition, Bentham argued, is an individual who habitually decides that crime’s seducing motives are more compelling than crime’s tutelary motives.\footnote{For the most part the tutelary motives that Bentham enumerated were all linked to the probability of detection. Bentham argued that when a given act is believed to have a high probability of being detected, tutelary motives will exert great force; and when a given act is believed to have a low probability of detection, tutelary motives will exert little force.} In the process of reforming the criminal will, then, the first task of the Panopticon was to render this disposition impotent. However, it was not possible to render this disposition impotent by simply dispelling the temptations of the seducing motives of crime. With a criminal disposition, seducing motives are too strong to be explained away. Instead, within the Panopticon the criminal disposition was first rendered impotent through inspection, which makes criminal activity itself impossible.

"Delinquents are a peculiar race of beings," Bentham commented, "who require unremitted inspection. Their weakness consists in yielding to the seduction of the passing moment. Their minds are weak and disordered" (W 1, p. 499). Bentham believed that the delinquent’s mind was weak and disordered to the extent that the pleasures of crime were always deemed greater than the pleasures of sociability or the pains associated with crime. Bentham contended (without providing much of an argument) that a true understanding of the greatest happiness principle proved that the criminal disposition cannot be anything more than an erroneous understanding of the relative weight of different pleasures and pains. In
this respect, delinquents were, according to Bentham, incapable of properly calculating their own interests, and for this reason Bentham often compared delinquents to children. But given that all human actions are motivated by ideas about and sensitivity to pleasure and pain, there is nothing surprising about the delinquent’s continual and habitual succumbing to the seducing motives of crime; given their criminal disposition, delinquents cannot do anything but succumb to these temptations. In committing a criminal act, the delinquent is simply following the most basic human impulse—the pursuit of happiness by seeking pleasure and avoiding pain. The delinquent’s disposition, then, programs him to commit criminal acts. It was this compulsion toward crime that led Bentham to claim that the “race” of delinquents are in need of unremitted inspection; and the unremitted inspection Bentham had in mind was the near omnipresent inspection offered by the Panopticon. On the one hand, such inspection is necessary because, given that the delinquent is programmed to commit crime, he must, for the protection of society, be watched at all times. Yet unremitted inspection does not serve only to protect society. According to Bentham, in addition to protecting society, unremitted inspection can also begin the task of reforming the criminal by rendering the criminal disposition impotent.

The unremitted inspection of the Panopticon facilitates the reform of the criminal because it is able to sever the connection between the criminal’s disposition and the criminal’s acts. If the prisoner is visible and observed at all times, then each and every transgression committed by the prisoner will result in punishment: unremitted inspection ensures there is no chance of getting away with any transgression. If each and every transgression will be punished, then the consequences of transgression will always be more

---

^Bentham’s idea of the “delinquent” is very similar to Hobbes’s idea of the “fool”. Like the fool, the delinquent is a career criminal. But there is a crucial difference between the fool and the delinquent. Hobbes’s fool becomes a career criminal on the basis of a reasoned and even reasonable argument. Bentham’s delinquent, on the other hand, is not the product of a reasoned argument but the product of a “high degree of sensibility” to the seducing motives of crime. The delinquent, then, unlike the fool, cannot help himself when he commits crime. More important, because the delinquent’s behaviour is programmed by his sensitivity to pleasure and pain, the delinquent’s behaviour cannot be altered through persuasion but only through re-education or reprogramming.
painful than pleasurable. Bentham’s argument was based on a problem raised but unresolved by Hobbes—the problem of the fool. The fool reasoned that since there is always a chance injustice will remain undetected, injustice is a better and more profitable course of action than justice; for the fool, the possibility of invisibility makes the life of crime a better way of life than the life of justice. Hobbes, having no response to this problem, hoped the power of the Leviathan would ensure that most people most of the time would be too fearful to follow the fool’s example. Bentham, however, seized on the fact that the possibility of invisibility was at the heart of the fool’s wager. As long as invisibility is possible, Bentham suggested, crime will necessarily exist. Bentham even conceded that outside the walls of the Panopticon, the fool’s wager, though a long shot, is indeed valid. Inside the Panopticon, however, the premise that grounds the fool’s wager is rendered nonsensical—invisibility is no longer possible. The Panopticon was designed to eliminate the possibility of invisibility and thereby sharply differentiate the world inside and the world outside its walls. The criminal disposition is based upon the experience that the pleasures of crime outweigh both the pleasures of justice and the pains of crime. The only way to prevent the delinquent from committing crime is to undermine this experience. To do so, crime must be linked with pain so that crime’s seducing motives, though they might still be felt, will be rendered impotent. Unremitted inspection, Bentham insisted, was the only way to link crime with pain. Though unremitted inspection does not destroy the disposition of the criminal—the individual under observation still experiences the temptations of crime—by making the detection (and punishment) of crime a certainty, such inspection makes it impossible for the individual to act upon this disposition. In this respect, unremitted inspection breaks the connection between impulse and action. Creating a gap between impulse and action was, Bentham contended, the first step in the process of reformation. To hold an unattainable idea of pleasure—that is, an idea of pleasure that when put into practice causes pain—was, Bentham implied, psychologically untenable. The goals of the unremitted inspection of the Panopticon
was to make the pleasures and pains associated with the criminal disposition untenable, and to force the criminal to come to this realization.

Bentham argued that if prisoners are to be forced to realize that their ideas of pleasure are untenable, the consequences of inspection must be made fully obvious to the prisoners. To make these consequences fully obvious, it was not enough that the prisoners be *told* that they are the objects of continual surveillance; the prisoners must instead be made to *experience* the concrete implications of their situation. Bentham outlined several methods by which such an experience could be produced. Among these methods, one in particular strikes me as encapsulating the complexity of Bentham’s understanding of human psychology. Bentham recommended singling out “one of the most untoward of the prisoners” and watching his every move. When the prisoner commits a transgression, it is to be recorded but not acted upon. In fact the prisoner should, “so long as he does not venture at something too serious to be endured”, be allowed to “do as he pleases that day”. The following day, however, the prisoner is to be presented with a detailed list of the transgressions committed and addressed in the following manner: “*You thought yourself undiscovered: you abused my indulgence: see how you were mistaken. Another time, you may have rope for two days, ten days: the longer it is, the heavier it will fall upon you. Learn from this, all of you, that in this house transgression never can be safe*” (*PPl*, VIII, pp. 81-82). This policy was designed to crush the will of the prisoner. First, the presentation of a detailed list highlights to the prisoner that there is no escape; each and every gesture can and will be captured by the guard’s gaze. Secondly, the timing of the intervention is critical in its overall psychological impact. For one day (which is to be the last such day) the prisoner is allowed to experience the pleasures of crime as true pleasures. Indeed, the prisoner is even allowed to experience the pleasures of crime to a heightened degree: he is able to continue his way of life even while imprisoned—and right under the noses of the guards. The next day, however, this experience of pleasure is shown to have been a hollow illusion; when presented with a detailed list of his transgressions, the prisoner realizes that he has not, in fact, gotten away
with anything. To have intervened at the very moment of the transgression would not have forced the prisoner to experience the hollowness of the pleasures of crime; instead of experiencing the hollowness of criminal pleasures, the prisoner would have experienced the disappointment of detection. Postponing the intervention allows the prisoner to (i) fully experience the pleasures of crime, and then (ii) be shown that this experience was nothing more than an illusion. It is the actual experience of the illusion of pleasure that will, Bentham suggested, effectively break the prisoner's will. The inspector's words to the prisoner are filled with symbolic meaning: the inspector's words signal to the prisoner that there is no going back, no possibility of recapturing what once was; the prisoner is being told that his way of life and his world have been destroyed. Such devastation is needed, Bentham argued, to effectively disconnect the prisoner's impulses and actions and thereby open the prisoner to the possibility of reformation.

Unremitted inspection, if properly used, has a purely negative effect: it serves to immobilize the criminal disposition by destroying the individual's previous experience of pleasure and pain. While it is relatively easy to bring about this destruction of the criminal disposition, it is much more difficult to transform the individual from a delinquent into a productive member of society. This transformation of the individual was to be accomplished in the Panopticon by manipulating sensation and thereby changing the individual's ideas about and sensitivity to pleasure and pain. But, Bentham insisted, if the manipulation of sensation is to begin with delinquents and produce truly productive members of society, the prisoners must want to undergo transformation. In this respect, Bentham adopted Hobbes's claims about the difference between destruction and conquest. Hobbes had argued: "He that is taken, and put into prison, or chains, is not Conquered, though Overcome" (Lev, a Review, and Conclusion, p. 720). Conquest, Hobbes explained, can only be accomplished through the individual's voluntary surrender and promise of obligation. Bentham understood reformation in similar terms. The prisoner, Bentham argued, cannot help but be overcome by the proper use of the inspection principle. However, if the prisoner is to be conquered he must willingly
submit to the process of reformation. Bentham argued that solitude was perhaps the most powerful means of generating a voluntary submission to the process of reformation. Bentham claimed that “solitude is in its nature subservient to the purposes of reformation” (Pan, VIII, p. 47). As Bentham put it, solitude must be used so that the prisoners are “to the keeper, a multitude, though not a crowd; to themselves, they are solitary and sequestered individuals” (Pan, VIII, p. 47). The prisoner must be left with his thoughts as his only companions, which will, Bentham insisted, force the prisoner to reflect upon these thoughts. This inward turn, when combined with the destruction of his former way of life, will incubate within the prisoner a longing for something new, something more substantial, and this longing must be nurtured and exploited if the prisoner is to be reformed. The desire for a rebirth is the only way in which the prisoner can be made into a willing participant in the process of reformation.

THE THEATRE OF PUNISHMENT

The reformation of the prisoners was to take place through what might be called the theatre of punishment. Though the theatre of punishment would surround the prisoners from the moment they entered the Panopticon, it could only begin to truly work on the individual

---

7Bentham later changed his opinion about solitude. In his initial description of the Panopticon prisoners were to be alone in their cells. Upon reflection, however, Bentham decided that each cell should hold two prisoners. “The choice lies,” Bentham explained, “not betwixt solitude and crowded rooms, but betwixt absolute perpetual and universal solitude ... and mitigated seclusion in very small assorted companies” (PP, V, p. 71). Bentham argued that he had reached the conclusion that, “Of perfect solitude in the penitentiary discipline I know but of one use—the breaking the spirit, as the phrase is, and subduing the contumacy of the intractable” (PP, V, pp. 71-72). Absolute solitude should not be used for anything other than this purpose and even then only for a very short time (two or three days) because, “solitude, when it ceases to be necessary, becomes worse than useless. ... It is product of gloomy despondency, or sullen insensibility. What better can be the result, when a vacant mind is left for months, or years, to prey upon itself” (PP, V, p. 74). Bentham further argued that a mitigated solitude was a better way to bring about a desire for reformation. Cellmates should be chosen with regard to, “every sort of consideration by which expediency can be influenced—to age, temper, character, talents, and capabilities” (PP, V, p. 71). Cellmates with something in common will be more desirable of reformation because such cellmates begin to experience the pleasures of sociability. “Sequestered society is favourable to friendship, the sister of the virtues. ... Each cell is an island:—the inhabitants, shipwrecked mariners, cast ashore upon it by the adverse blasts of fortune: partners in affliction, indebted to each other for whatever share they are permitted to enjoy of society, the greatest of all comforts” (PP, V, p. 74).
Chapter 4: Education Within the Panopticon

when he desired to be reborn. Bentham’s theatre of punishment was structured around the belief that sensation is the source of ideas; Bentham claimed that to control what the prisoner sees is to control the contents of the prisoner’s mind. Bentham therefore insisted that within the Panopticon, one must, “lose no occasion of speaking to the eye” (*Pan*, VIII, p. 80) because, as Bentham explained elsewhere, “Speak to the eye, if you would move the heart” (*Wi*, p. 549).8 “Speaking to the eye” requires an understanding of the mechanics of human sensation; and to manipulate the senses, one must first understand the human machine. As I outlined in the previous chapter, Bentham offered his *A Table of the Springs of Action* as a scientific account of the human machine, and the orchestration of sensation in the Panopticon was to follow Bentham’s table. But speaking to the eye also required the construction of a space within which sensation could be controlled, and Bentham believed the Panopticon offered such a space. The design of the Panopticon, its interplay of visibility and invisibility, and its ability to regulate with whom and when the prisoner can communicate, made the Panopticon a place wherein the total control of sensation was a possibility. The inspectors could control what the prisoners saw and heard at all times. It was this ability to control sensation that was the foundation of Bentham’s attempt to construct a theatre of punishment.

In the Panopticon, punishment should not attack the body of the prisoner, but instead, should always speak to the prisoner’s eyes. Through this theatre of punishment, the prisoners were to be thought of as the captive audience of a carefully orchestrated sensory bombardment designed to transform their ideas and thus bring about their reformation.9

---

8In the Panopticon, Bentham concentrates on vision as the sense which is to be bombarded. In part, as Evans suggested in *The fabrication of virtue*, this focus on vision is due to technological limitations. For example, Bentham tried, but could not perfect, a way to achieve a control of the ear as total as the control of the eye. Even if Bentham could not achieve a complete domination of the senses, his Panopticon achieved a domination which was sufficient, in Bentham’s estimation, to transform the content of the mind.

9The Panopticon does not only speak to the eyes of the prisoners, but also to the eyes of the wider society. “It would be placed in the neighbourhood of the metropolis,” Bentham wrote, “where the greatest number of persons are collected together, and especially those who require to be reminded, by penal exhibitions, of the consequences of crime. The appearance of the building, the singularity of its shape, the walls and ditches by which it would be surrounded, the guards stationed at its gates,
Bentham’s theatre of punishment involved informing each moment of the prisoners’ everyday lives with symbolic representations of crime, punishment, justice, guilt, and renewal. These symbols, Bentham explained, would serve to reinforce the profound implications of crime and punishment, and they would also point the prisoner beyond the world of crime. Bentham looked to the Spanish Inquisition as an example of how symbols should be used in this theatre of punishment. Bentham explained that he was not above admiring the “stage effect” of the Inquisition because, even if the Inquisition was “unjust” and “barbarous in degree”, its “terrific scenery, deserves rather to be admired and imitated than condemned” (*Pan*, VII, pp. 79-80; Cf. *W1*, pp. 549-550). The robes of the Inquisitors, the dramatic organization of their proceedings were, among other things, singled out by Bentham. By employing such theatrical effects, the Inquisition managed to impress upon its victims the gravity of their situation, and Bentham hoped to imitate this effect. For example, Bentham suggested that the prisoners wear masks when attending religious services within the Panopticon’s chapel. This, Bentham argued, would heighten the “salutary impression” of the service.\(^{10}\) “The scene of devotion,” Bentham pronounced, “will be decorated by—why mince the word?—by a masquerade: a masquerade, indeed, but of what kind? not a gay and dangerous, but a serious, affecting, and instructive one” (*Pan*, VII, p. 79). Bentham concluded this line of speculation with the following comment: “In a well-composed committee of penal law, I know of no more essential personage that the manager of a theatre”

---

\(^{10}\) Bentham argued that a room full of prisoners in masks would make for an ominous spectacle that would aid the opening of the prisoners’ minds for the messages from the pulpit. He also made the claim that masks would have the beneficial side-effect of hiding the individual’s identity so that no individual would feel humiliated by the gaze of the priest.
Chapter 4: Education Within the Panopticon

(Pan, VII, p. 80). If the interior of the Panopticon is orchestrated such that the prisoners’ senses are continually bombarded by grave and serious images of crime, then the prisoners will slowly begin to internalize such ideas. If and when such ideas were internalized, Bentham believed that the prisoner would be well on the road to rehabilitation and to becoming a productive member of society.

In the attempt to drive home the horrors of crime to the prisoners, the theatre of punishment was, by necessity, melodramatic. The horrors of crime, Bentham implied, can only be adequately represented by exaggerated symbols—masquerades and grotesque images of injustice. Once these symbols have been internalized, however, the theatre of punishment becomes more subtle. Once the prisoner’s mind has been informed by the horrors of crime, another more practical and less melodramatic type of education can begin. Bentham wrote of the prisoners (especially the young prisoners): “The prison should be their school, in which they should learn those habits, which should prevent their ever entering it again” (WI, p. 500). There were several methods by which these habits could be taught, but Bentham focused on labour. The prisoners were to be involved in some form of labour from the moment they entered the Panopticon; but prior to internalizing the link between crime and pain, labour would be viewed by the prisoners as nothing more than a form of punishment. When the link between crime and pain has been internalized, however, the prisoners’ view of labour would change. When the prisoner has internalized the horrors of crime and has come to feel a desire to be reborn, labour comes to be viewed as what will, eventually, enable the prisoner to re-enter society. Labour teaches the prisoners skills that are applicable outside the walls of the Panopticon, so through labour the prisoners will “obtain new faculties and new enjoyments; and when they shall be set free, will have learned a trade, the profits of which are greater than those of fraud and rapine” (WI, p. 499). Labour, then, teaches the prisoners skills that will allow them to live honest, profitable lives when they leave the Panopticon. The educational effect of labour is not limited to the acquisition of skills, however. At the same time that labour can teach the prisoner new skills, Bentham argued that it can also be
used to give the prisoner hope. When the prisoner has come to desire to be reborn, the prisoner has begun to aspire to the life lived by most people; labour is the way to make the prisoner understand that this aspiration is within his grasp. The theatre of punishment has accomplished its task when the prisoner, of his own accord, begins to desire the life of a law-abiding citizen, and expresses this desire by finding pleasure in labour.

The goal of Bentham's theatre of punishment was the remaking of the prisoners. Through the theatre of punishment, the prisoners were to be transformed—from individuals with criminal dispositions to individuals whose pleasures and pains harmonize with the community as a whole. In outlining the theatre of punishment as a means of accomplishing this goal, Bentham was not only excited by its efficacy but also by its economy. The theatre of punishment was, Bentham suggested, the best example of an ideal system of punishment because it could work without producing a surplus of pain. When Bentham described the pain associated with punishment, he explained, “It is the real punishment which produces all the evil: it is the apparent punishment which produces all the good” (\textit{WJ}, p. 549). Real punishment involves the infliction of corporeal pain, whereas apparent punishment is a disguised form of education. Apparent punishment involves teaching the prisoners about the errors of their ways and giving them the chance to make a new beginning. The term “theatre of punishment”, then, refers not only to an orchestration of sensation but also to the fact that, in essence, punishment within the Panopticon is not “real”, only “apparent”. Within the walls of the Panopticon, real punishment, if used at all, should only be used to break the prisoner. Once the prisoner has been broken, the need for real punishment vanishes to be replaced by apparent punishment. The theatre of punishment does not so much punish as educate the prisoners. After their stay in the Panopticon, Bentham implied the prisoners will, in retrospect, realize that what they experienced in the Panopticon was not the hostility of society but society's benevolence. The prisoner will realize that his life was not manipulated to extract a penalty, but to enable him to undergo the metamorphosis from a dangerous beast to a fully socialized individual. The former prisoner will come to realize that within the
Panopticon he had been taught the most profound lesson of all—exactly how to succeed in the pursuit of happiness.
Chapter 5
The Pursuit of Efficiency

THE PLACE OF THE PANOPTICON

Bentham’s political philosophy was animated by a desire to make politics, and matters of crime and punishment, as efficient and economical as possible. Bentham measured political economy in terms of the amount of pain needed to preserve security and order—as the amount of required pain increases, politics becomes less economical. Bentham used the felicific calculus and the greatest happiness principle as the tools by which to calculate the political economy of actual legislation and institutions; he also used the felicific calculus and the greatest happiness principle as tools to guide speculation about new, more efficient forms of legislation and institutions. The felicific calculus and the greatest happiness principle were therefore in Bentham’s hands vehicles for social reform. The felicific calculus and greatest happiness principle were used by Bentham to identify institutions that either hindered happiness or produced a surplus of pain; the felicific calculus and the greatest happiness principle were also used by Bentham to build institutions capable of facilitating the greatest happiness of the greatest number. With the Panopticon Bentham attempted to use the felicific calculus and the greatest happiness principle to replace inefficient institutions with something more economical. The Panopticon, through the use of the “inspection principle” and through the creation of a theatre of punishment, could shape behaviour with a minimal to non-existent use of pain. The Panopticon could accomplish this task because it was built around a scientific account of the dynamics of the human machine. This science of the human machine enabled punishment to target the mind rather than the body and to bring about the reformation of the prisoner by transforming the prisoner’s ideas. The Panopticon, then, was a technology that could revolutionize political practice because it made possible the manipulation of the human machine and thereby gave birth to a new power of mind over
mind. Furthermore, Bentham insisted, the use of this new power of mind over mind was not limited to prisons. Bentham sought to demonstrate that if the principles of the Panopticon were extended into mental asylums, hospitals, schools, and factories, they would bring about as dramatic a change as they promised to do in the case of the prison.

“What would you say,” Bentham asked, “if by the gradual adoption and diversified application of this single principle [the inspection principle], you should see a new scene of things spread itself over the face of society?” (Pan, XXI, p. 66). And the extension of the inspection principle would, Bentham insisted, bring about a dramatic change of scenery. However, it must be noted that though Bentham thought the inspection principle could be applied to a variety of different institutions, Bentham did not think it either possible or necessary to universalize the inspection principle. For Bentham, the Panopticon represented a new and revolutionary tool of government; but he insisted it should not be seen as a new and revolutionary model of government. Given Bentham’s claims about the power of his new institution it is worth reflecting on why he resisted its universalization. Why not put forward the Panopticon as a representation of government in general? Put simply, Bentham believed it would be uneconomical to universalize the Panopticon. The desire to universalize the Panopticon could only grow out of an assumption explicitly rejected by Bentham—that each and every individual needs to be the object of inspection at each and every moment. As I outlined in Chapter 3, Bentham argued that a properly structured system of education could ensure that the well-educated individual was a self-policing individual; to be properly educated was to have a natural impulse to do the right thing. Bentham’s claims about education, then, caused him to resist universalizing the Panopticon; individuals whose ideas about pleasure and pain have been properly formed do not need to be the objects of unremitted inspection.1 Though his beliefs about education caused Bentham to resist

---

1Douglas G. Long implied that Bentham’s understanding of education did tend toward universalizing the Panopticon. Long wrote: “To determine how large the area of unregulated individual activities might be we need only ask ourselves what proportion of human thought is so private, what percentage of private action is so inconsequential, that is results in no perceptible social consequences. Given the
universalizing the Panopticon, these beliefs were also responsible for his efforts to generalize the Panopticon. Society will be strengthened, Bentham argued, if the inspection principle was extended into all institutions that are concerned with the (re)formation of an individual’s ideas about pleasure and pain. Schools and prisons were, Bentham implied, the most important institutions concerned with the (re)formation of ideas. But Bentham also noted that the principle of the Panopticon could be used to transform behaviour without (re)forming ideas, and he argued that in certain cases the Panopticon should be put to such use. He put forward several examples, including mental asylums, hospitals, and factories, wherein the principle of the Panopticon was to be used to transform behaviour to bring about a somewhat forced harmony of interest between the governors and the governed. In what follows I will look briefly at these two different uses of the Panopticon and turn to an investigation of Bentham’s assessment of the potential abuse of the new power generated by the Panopticon.

Schools are concerned with the formation of ideas. To accomplish this task, the model of Panopticon has, Bentham argued, several advantages over any other educational institution. Bentham wrote, for example, “All play, all chattering—in short, all distraction of every kind, is effectually banished by the central ... situation of the master, seconded by partitions or screens between the scholars” (Pan, XXI, p. 63). These distractions are banished because, as in prisons, the students are to be both (i) the objects of unremitted inspection and (ii) solitary. The benefits of this arrangement were multiple: unremitted inspection would force the student to devote all of her energy to the lessons at hand; solitude would force the

inevitable results of such a calculus, we should not be surprised to find that for Bentham the category of ‘private self-regarding act’ was virtually vestigial” (Douglas G. Long, Bentham on Liberty. pp. 215-216). Long suggested Bentham’s project of social engineering tended toward totalitarianism—the greatest happiness of the greatest number demands a near-total regulation of thought by the technologies of education. But, even if a tendency to universalize the Panopticon can be found in the logic of Bentham’s political philosophy, this tendency goes against the spirit of Bentham’s political philosophy. Bentham never suggested that the Panopticon was a model for society as a whole; he wanted the use of the Panopticon to be circumscribed by clearly defined limits. The question, then, is whether or not the logic of Bentham’s political project made it impossible to erect solid boundaries around the Panopticon.
student to rely on herself in the completion of her lessons ("That species of fraud as Westminster called cribbing, a vice thought hitherto congenial to schools, will never creep in here" [Pan, XXI, p. 63]). The great benefit of unremitting inspection and solitude was that they would make, "different measures and casts of talent, ... perhaps for the first time, distinctly discernable" (Pan, XXI, p. 63). Instructors, now having the ability to clearly see the differences between their students, would thus be able to tailor their lessons to the particular disposition and capacities of each individual student. And, Bentham suggested, it is this ability to highlight the individual that makes the Panopticon the ideal educational technology. In the "theatre of education" each student will observe a different spectacle, and a spectacle designed to manipulate the student's particular disposition and talents to produce the maximum effect. In other words, the student's ideas could be formed in and through a sensory bombardment tailor-made for the student's unique sensitivities. In a school based on the principles of the Panopticon, individual differences could be discovered and exploited. These different sensibilities, if left untreated, will eventually lead to political and social instability; but they can be tempered early in the educational process. Differences can now be scientifically exploited to produce individuals who, because they share the same pleasures and pains, will form a single, harmonious social body. The Panopticon, because it is able to make individual differences fully visible, is also able to erase these differences and thereby create a unified body politic.

As I mentioned in the previous chapter, Bentham viewed prisons as a part of the educational system. Criminals are individuals who, for whatever reason, have failed to internalize the social understandings of pleasure and pain. In its role as a prison, the Panopticon was to be a more condensed and severe form of education that attempted to rehabilitate and reform the criminal. In this respect, as a prison the Panopticon was to

---

2Moreover, making different levels of talent discernable would also ensure that "incurable and irreproachable dullness or imbecility will no longer be punished for the sins of idleness or obstenity" (Pan, XXI, p. 63).
function not to form ideas, as in a school, but to reform ideas. Mental asylums, however, differed from both schools and prisons. Bentham argued that the insane were individuals immune to the effects of education. Thus, even if built upon the principles of the Panopticon, mental asylums were not understood by Bentham to be houses of education. Instead, mental asylums should employ the principles of the Panopticon (i) to make the treatment of the insane more humane and (ii) to render impossible the abuse of the inmates by their keepers. In the first case, Bentham argued that, "The powers of the insane ... are capable of being directed against their fellow-creatures or against themselves"; and if "nothing less than perpetual chains" can prevent the insane from harming themselves, when it comes to harming others, the inspection principle "would render the use of chains and other modes of corporeal sufferance as unnecessary in this case as in any" (Pan, XIX, pp. 60-61). The inspection principle, then, though it cannot completely eliminate the necessity of corporeal restraint within mental asylums, can minimize this necessity and thereby make mental asylums more humane. In the second case, Bentham argued that because the keepers were to be, like the inmates, the objects of continual inspection, any abuse of the inmates by their keepers would "find much readier satisfaction than it could anywhere at present" (Pan, XIX, pp. 61). Even if the principle of the Panopticon cannot cure the insane, Bentham argued, the principle of the Panopticon should still be used insofar as it was capable of giving rise to a more humane way of dealing with the insane by reducing the necessity of corporeal restraint and by eliminating the abuse of the inmates.

Bentham’s comments about mental asylums demonstrate his willingness to extend the Panopticon beyond educational institutions. In the mental asylum the inspection principle would be used to shape behaviour even though it would not be (and could not be) used to shape ideas. In two other instances—the hospital and the factory—Bentham went even further afield from the (re)formation of ideas. In each of these examples the inspection principle would be employed to alter behaviour without even attempting to shape ideas. In the hospital, the inspection principle was to be used to enable the surgeon to observe, "with
the least trouble possible”, the “progress of the disease, and the influence of the remedy” (Pan, XX, p. 61). The inspection principle would, Bentham argued, facilitate the science of medicine by turning the sick individual into a permanent scientific object—the doctor could continually observe the patient and note any change for the better or worse. In this respect, through the inspection principle the hospital was to become a laboratory for the study of disease and the study of cures. But Bentham’s belief that the principle of the Panopticon should be extended to hospitals was also based on the argument that it could reduce and even eliminate the risk of infection. First, the rigorous segregation within the Panopticon would prevent one patient from passing disease to other patients. Secondly—in an even more interesting reason advanced by Bentham about the Panopticon curing infection—because the “governor” of the hospital was to be located in the inspection lodge at the centre of the hospital, the governor would have a very unique interest in the hospital’s cleanliness. “Encompassed on all sides by a multitude of persons,” Bentham explained, “whose good or bad condition depends upon himself, he stands as a hostage in his own hands for the salubrity of the whole” (Pan, XX, p. 62). Because the governor was threatened by the spread of disease, the governor had almost as much at stake in the cure of disease as did the patient. The Panopticon, then, would improve medicine as a whole because it would give the doctor a unique vantage from which to study disease, but also because, by placing the governor at the centre of the hospital, the Panopticon would unify the interests of the patient and the doctor.

In the hospital, then, the principle of the Panopticon was in part used to forge a shared interest between patient and doctor—the prevention of contagion and the cure of disease. Bentham’s comments about the factory further developed the Panopticon’s ability to forge shared interests between individuals in different positions. The Panopticon, Bentham explained, could be used to make the factory more efficient by making hard labour as much in the interest of the workers as it was in the interest of the owner. The principle of the Panopticon was unnecessary, Bentham claimed, when workers were paid according to the piece, because in this case, “the interest which the workman has in the value of his work
supersedes the use of coercion, and of every expedient calculated to give force to it” (Pan, XVIII, p. 60). But, Bentham argued, “the utility of the principle [of inspection] is obvious and incontestable, in all cases where the workmen are paid according to their time” (Pan, XVIII, p. 60). To be paid according to time, Bentham insisted, made idleness the interest of the worker—to decrease the amount of work is to increase the value of one’s wage. The owner, however, has an interest in preventing idleness, because to decrease idleness is to increase profit. Bentham argued that the inspection principle could be used to solve this dilemma between the interest of the workers and the interest of the owner. The inspection principle will ensure that, regardless of their interest in idleness, those who are paid according to time will still be compelled to engaged in hard labour for the entire working day. This extension of the Panopticon to factories is thus unique, because Bentham made no effort to argue that it will bring about a unification of the interests of the workers and the owners. When workers are paid according to time, idleness will always be their natural interest, while the owner is naturally interested in maximizing profit. Instead of harmonizing interests, inspection forces the workers to comply with the interests of the owner, a compulsion that Bentham evidently saw as quite legitimate. The example of the factory highlights the manner in which Bentham sought to extend the inspection principle. While he argued that the Panopticon was most efficient in bringing about the (re)formation of ideas, he also recognized that the principle of the Panopticon could be used to bring about a forced harmony of interest between the governed and governors. In the case of the hospital, this forced harmony was used to make the governors more sympathetic to the plight of the governed, but in the case of the factory, the inspection principle was used to bring about a forced harmony that saw the governed submitting to the interests of the governors.

ABUSING THE POWER OF THE PANOPTICON

The example of the factory raises an important issue. The factory demonstrates that the Panopticon not only made possible the (re)formation of ideas to bring about a harmony of interests; the Panopticon also represented a new way of compelling individuals to engage in
certain behaviours even if this behaviour was *not* in their own interest. This latter possibility implied that the Panopticon could be used to subvert Bentham’s political dream of a community joined by a shared experience of pleasure and pain, and Bentham recognized the possibility of such subversion. The Panopticon did not simply allow for a type of education that could implant within each individual the proper ideas about pleasure and pain, but also held out the possibility of a new and effective means of allowing the interests of some to dominate over the interests of others. The Panopticon could, Bentham saw, be used to protect “sinister interests”.

In this respect, even as the Panopticon represented a new form of power that was efficient and could eliminate certain types of abuse, the Panopticon also created the possibility of novel abuses of power. As I have outlined, Bentham believed the Panopticon would make corporeal abuses a thing of the past. But, even if the Panopticon could eliminate physical abuse, Bentham did admit that by creating a new power of “mind over mind” the Panopticon could be used by “party men” and “sects” to bring about a new type of domination. I will turn to Bentham’s evaluation of the new abuse of power made possible by the Panopticon, as well as Bentham’s proposed means of preventing these abuses.

Bentham argued that the principle of the Panopticon was a strictly formal technique that allowed for the manipulation of the human machine. The formal nature of the Panopticon was, Bentham claimed, part of its genius. Bentham wrote of the Panopticon: “Its great excellence consists in the great strength it is capable of giving to any institution it may be thought proper to apply it to” (*Pan*, XXI, p. 66). Because of its formal nature, the principle of the Panopticon was adaptable to an almost infinite variety of uses, an adaptability that, Bentham suggested, greatly enhanced the utility of the Panopticon. The Panopticon can be used in any situation in which it promises to be an economical and efficient replacement for

---

3 For Bentham a “sinister interest” was a situation wherein those in positions of power and political authority used this position to promote their own narrow self-interest as opposed to the interest of the community as a whole (i.e., the greatest happiness of the greatest number). Part of Bentham’s attempt to reform politics concerned using the principle of the greatest happiness of the greatest number to highlight examples of sinister interest, and to agitate for their elimination.
an already-existing institution, and in any situation in which it promises to be an economical and efficient solution to a social problem. But if the formal nature of the Panopticon had certain benefits, it also raised serious problems. The strictly formal nature of the Panopticon not only made it applicable to any institution, but also made it capable of implanting any idea whatsoever in the individual. The Panopticon enables the manipulation of the human machine, but the Panopticon cannot guarantee that this manipulation has anything to do with the truth. In fact, the principle of the Panopticon could be used for the deliberate distortion of the truth. This possibility was the new abuse of power opened by the Panopticon. Bentham wrote:

Party men, and controversialists of every description, and all other such epicures, whose mouth waters at the mammon of power, might here give themselves a rich treat, adapted to their several tastes, unembittered by contradiction. Two and two might here be less than four, or the moon might be made of green cheese; if any pious founder, who were rich enough, chose to have her of that material. Surrounded by a circle of pupils, obsequious beyond anything as yet known under the name of obsequiousness, their happiness might in such a mansion be complete, if any moderate number of adherents could content them; which unhappily is not the case. (Pan. XXI, p. 63)^

The danger of the Panopticon is linked to its efficacy. That the Panopticon is so effective in the production of ideas can make the Panopticon the instrument for the production of an almost untreatable dogmatism. In this respect, the Panopticon represented a technology that could be used by those with sinister interests to engage in a program of brainwashing and social control unparalleled in both its scope and its effectiveness.

Bentham, however, rather quickly dismissed this problem. The Panopticon, Bentham insisted, is a neutral instrument, capable of inflicting either good or evil depending on who uses it and how. Bentham compared the Panopticon to a knife, asking whether knives should be forbidden because they have been employed “by assassins to cut throats with” (Pan, XXI, p. 66). Using this example, Bentham argued that no one could reasonably condemn “a great

---

^“At the end of some twenty or five-and-twenty years,” Bentham continued, “introduce the scholars of the different schools to one another (observing first to tie their hands behind them) and you will see good sport” (Pan, XXI, p. 63).
and new invented instrument of government” simply because some of its possible uses appear to be, “useless, or trifling, or mischievous, or ridiculous” (*Pan*, XXI, p. 66). Such uses of the Panopticon, Bentham concluded, are not to be attributed to the Panopticon itself, just as the assassin’s use of the knife should not be attributed to the knife itself. “If any perverse applications should ever be made of it [the Panopticon],” Bentham explained, “they will lie in this case as in others, at the doors of those who make them” (*PL*, XXI, p. 66). The great benefits of the proper use of the Panopticon, Bentham suggested, far outweighed the dangers of its abuse. Moreover, Bentham believed that preventing any abuses of the power of the Panopticon was as simple as ensuring that the use of the Panopticon was always guided by the greatest happiness principle; Bentham was satisfied that the greatest happiness principle provided the means of assessing whether or not a particular use of the Panopticon would indeed benefit humanity. As long as reasonable individuals possessed of a scientific understanding of humanity and politics were the directors of the Panopticon, the Panopticon would bring about a dramatic change for the better. Such individuals would never use the Panopticon to brainwash and dominate individuals; they would instead use it to fill individuals with the proper social ideas of pleasure and pain, thereby creating a unified and harmonious community of pleasure and pain. Under such guidance, the Panopticon would be the foundation of a new, more rational and humane body politic. The goal of political reformers, then, was to make sure that the greatest happiness principle remained at the forefront of the extension of the Panopticon into society at large.

Whether or not Bentham adequately understood, and adequately responded to, the potential abuses of the principle of the Panopticon is an open question. In fact, his own willingness to employ the Panopticon within factories suggests that though Bentham wanted to use the greatest happiness principle as a vehicle for reform, he was also willing to use it to bring about a forced harmony of interests, which demonstrated his own support of unquestioned social assumptions. In this instance, then, Bentham himself—though inadvertently—raises doubts about the objectivity of his greatest happiness principle; because
it is so vague, it seems little more than a device that allows assumptions about social happiness to be translated into pseudo-scientific discourse. But if Bentham failed to offer a convincing standard to guide the use of the Panopticon, he certainly described an instrument of power that had far-reaching political implications. Indeed, Bentham’s Panopticon represented a new way in which the science of life could be used politically. Life was no longer understood in terms of natural right but in terms of processes that could be understood and then manipulated. How life was to be manipulated, however, was not really understood by Bentham. Bentham, who was so clear-headed about the new power he had discovered, was incredibly naive about how this new power would be used to transform the political scene. The Panopticon is not, despite Bentham’s claims, a neutral instrument. Instead, it is a technology that carries with it a certain logic that would make possible new judgments about the interests of the body politic, and these new judgements would bring about a new relation between the individual and power. Power now had the capacity to shape each and every individual in the effort to secure the happiness of the body politic.\(^5\) It was not long before this capacity was turned into a right: governments, because they could, were seen to have a right, and perhaps even a duty, to use the new technologies at their disposal to ensure that the individual fit seamlessly into the social body.

---

\(^5\) Bentham’s understanding of the relationship between the individual and political power was the basis of J.S. Mill’s break with Benthamite utilitarianism. Douglas Long wrote: “His [Bentham’s] vision of utilitarian society embodied the idea of a near-unanimity of wills founded upon a near-homogeneity of individual personalities. ... Mill sought to devise ways of escaping from a stultifying, stagnant social conformity in order that an open-ended, creative, and dynamic liberty might be enjoyed both as an end in itself and as an indirect source, through free social innovation, of great benefits to political society in general” (Douglas G. Long. *Bentham on Liberty*. p. 118). The great difference between Mill and Bentham was that “Bentham’s psychology and—to transplant a term—his sociology did not induce him to fear, or even to comprehend, the notion of the ‘tyranny of the majority’” (ibid. p. 117).
Both Hobbes and Bentham based their account of human motion on the same fundamental assumption: pleasure and pain are the basic impulses of all human motion. Hobbes’s and Bentham’s respective sciences of pleasure and pain were, however, quite different. According to Hobbes, the specific objects an individual found pleasurable and painful could not become the objects of science. The objects of pleasure and pain were, Hobbes insisted, matters of taste determined by the singularity of the human heart. The science of motion must therefore remain a general science of pleasure and pain that explains the motion of ‘mankind’ rather than the motion of particular individuals. Hobbes argued that political science must be built on this general foundation. According to Bentham, however, the specific pleasures and pains of each and every individual could be known scientifically. Bentham, following the Enlightenment materialists, constructed an encyclopedic codification of the mechanics of human motion. First, this detailed codification allowed Bentham to claim that the individual’s ideas about pleasure and pain could be determined with certainty. Secondly, this detailed codification allowed Bentham to argue that the individual’s ideas about pleasure and pain could, given the proper context, be manipulated. For Bentham, then, governing became the art of manipulating an individual’s ideas about pleasure and pain and, thereby, the specific objects and individual found pleasurable and painful. Bentham’s account of human motion thus opened the individual to scientific scrutiny and political manipulation.

In effect, Bentham’s science of human motion politicized pleasure and pain. For Hobbes, pleasure and pain, though they certainly had political effects, were not in and of themselves political categories. “The Desires, and other Passions of man,” Hobbes argued, “are in themselves no Sin. No more are the Actions, that proceed from those Passions, tille
they know a Law that forbids them" (Lev, I, XIII, p. 187). At the level of pleasure and pain there is no good and evil, no justice and injustice; pleasure and pain themselves can never be categorized as sin, and the actions inspired by pleasure and pain can only be categorized as such by the artifice of the law. Bentham’s science of human motion, on the other hand, allowed pleasure and pain to be categorized in terms of good and evil. Using the greatest happiness principle, the creation of law was not necessary to understand which pleasures and pains were socially and politically (i) beneficial, (ii) neutral, or (iii) dangerous. Instead, it could be determined with certainty which pleasures and pains tend to spark actions that increase the happiness of all, and which pleasures and pains tend to spark actions that decrease the happiness of all. In this respect the law is not to be used to determine which pleasures and pains are good and which are evil, but the law should follow and reinforce the scientific judgements made possible by the greatest happiness principle. Pleasures and pains could now, through the application of science, be categorized according to a political grid. The pleasures and pains that increase the happiness of all should be encouraged and reinforced, and those that decrease the happiness of all should be suppressed. Bentham, in his *A Table of the Springs of Action*, attempted to construct such a political account of pleasure and pain. The *A Table of the Springs of Action* was to be used by the legislator to create of a community of pleasure and pain that will maximize happiness by producing the greatest happiness of the greatest number. An individual’s sensitivity to certain pleasures and pain had thus become more than a matter of taste: it had become a way of determining whether or not the individual stands in need of the type of education that could be provided by the unremitted inspection and manipulation of sensation made possible by the Panopticon.

Bentham’s politicization of pleasure and pain did not only radicalize Hobbes’s own understanding of pleasure and pain; it also effectively overturned Hobbes’s understanding of life. For Hobbes, life was a universal concept, applying to all people at all times. First, all people, Hobbes argued, desired self-preservation. Secondly, Hobbes argued that the physiological dynamics of life were the same in all individuals at all times. In fact, Hobbes
claimed that the warlike behaviour in the state of nature and the peaceful behaviour in the best possible commonwealth were both inspired by the same physiological dynamics. Hobbes, then, used the same general concept of life to account for all human behaviour. Bentham’s politicization of pleasure and pain, however, made it possible to attach certain kinds of behaviour to certain kinds of life; it was no longer necessary to reduce all behaviour to one general concept of life. Indeed, to reduce all behaviour to a single general concept of life was now so abstract as to be useless, and perhaps even dangerous. For example, from Bentham’s perspective, Hobbes’s concept of human nature is too abstract because it establishes a misleading identity between the criminal and the non-criminal. There is indeed an identity between these two individuals. Both pursue pleasure and avoid pain. One could argue further that both are animated by a desire for self-preservation (or, in Bentham’s language, “security”). This identity is, however, superficial; and if one looks below the surface, a significant difference between the criminal and the non-criminal is revealed. The criminal is animated by a sensitivity to socially dangerous pleasures, while the non-criminal is animated by a sensitivity to socially beneficial pleasures. Hobbes’s general understanding of life can only obscure this important difference. On the one hand, because he only examined the general dynamics of physiology, Hobbes could only explain the difference between the criminal and the non-criminal by arguing that the habitual criminal was an individual who remained unpersuaded about the necessity of government.¹ On the other hand, Hobbes implied that since all individuals share the same physiological dynamics, if one individual is capable of crime all individuals are—at least in principle. Such logic, Bentham insisted, had quite disastrous political implications. If all individuals are equally capable of crime, then the sovereign must be, or at least appear to be, omnipotent and omnipresent—Hobbes’s general account of physiology is thus wedded to absolute sovereignty. If, however, as Bentham suggested, the physiological differences between the criminal and the non-

¹See footnote 8, page 113.
criminal disprove the claim that all individuals are potential criminals, then absolute sovereignty, as well as the universalization of the Panopticon, can be shown to be inefficient and uneconomical. Only those who have a physiological sensitivity to anti-social pleasures—that is, those with criminal dispositions—need to be the objects of unremitting inspection. Absolute sovereignty is an unjustifiable response to the small minority of individuals with criminal dispositions, and the Panopticon need only apply to this small minority.

Bentham’s politicized account of pleasure and pain, and his notion of the different types of physiology changed the complexion of the body politic. The body politic is not, as the frontispiece of Hobbes’s *Leviathan* indicated, made up of individual atoms identical in their constitution. Instead, the body politic is made up of individuals who can be differentiated based upon their physiological sensitivity to specific types of pleasures and pains. It was this understanding of the differences between individuals that allowed Bentham to refer to criminals or delinquents as a “race”. Criminals, because of their sensitivity to anti-social pleasures, are a socially distinct class: they possess a certain disposition that differentiates them from all non-criminals. As Bentham used the term, race does have a biological dimension, though it does not represent an unbridgeable gap between the criminal and the non-criminal.² Bentham did not understand the race of criminals in terms of speciation but in terms of ignorance. Even if the criminal disposition is the product of physiology, the elimination of the criminal disposition does not require a change in physiology but a change of mind; and such a change of mind is possible because criminals, though they are sensitive to the pleasures of crime, are also sensitive to the transformation of

---

²Among the biological causes of a criminal disposition Bentham included a “radical frame of body”, “race or lineage”, “sex”, and “bodily imperfections”. His coupling of “race and lineage” highlights an important tension in the use of the term “race”. The term was used to denote ancestry (i.e., any animal or plant from a common stock belonged to the same race) and to denote differences in kind that allowed individuals to be grouped together (i.e., the sexes could be called races). Bentham was writing just before these two denotations were fused to create the term as we know it—a group different in kind from other groups because of its particular biological inheritance.
their specific ideas about pleasure and pain by the manipulation of sensation.\(^3\) The criminal is not, Bentham insisted, an enemy of the state, but an individual in need of help. Punishment should not be understood in terms of a war against criminals, but as the treatment of a social disease. Criminals, because of their physiological sensitivity to certain pleasures and pains are impelled toward crime; they are like children who, because ignorant, cannot help but disturb the happiness of the community. But, like a child, the criminal can and should be (re)educated, and thus, as is the case with children, the state’s power over criminals should be paternal in nature. The state should do everything in its power to turn the criminal away from a self-destructive pursuit of pleasure and into a productive member of society. The state, then, must not give into the temptation to use punishment either to satisfy the desire for revenge or to destroy the criminal; the state should attempt to use punishment to help the criminal by making crime as a way of life impossible.

**LIFE AND POWER**

Bentham’s distinction between criminals and non-criminals altered the foundation of politics and power, which, for Hobbes, had been the category of life. Once individuals are divided into different groups, the general category of life no longer has any political significance. With the appearance of race and physiological differences between individuals, rights are no longer, as Hobbes had claimed, attached to life. Instead, rights are attached to an individual’s type of life, which makes it possible to claim that criminals and non-criminals possess different rights by virtue of their different dispositions. To use Bentham’s terminology, disposition becomes that which determines the relationship between an individual and the government. Bentham’s idea of disposition implied that it was no longer the actual

---

\(^3\)It is in this respect that Bentham differentiates individuals with criminal dispositions from individuals who are mad. As noted in the previous chapter, Bentham argued that the mad could not be educated. A mad individual is an individual whose physiology not only moves him toward anti-social pleasures but also completely distorts the processes of sensation. It is because of this distortion of the processes of sensation that the mad individual cannot be cured by education. Unlike the transformation of the criminal disposition, the transformation of insanity would require a physiological change.
committing of a crime that proved an individual stood in need of treatment. If it were possible to develop a technique whereby disposition could be diagnosed prior to a criminal act, then an individual could and should be treated as belonging to the race of criminals without actually having committed a crime. That Bentham himself did not put forward such a technique neither proved it practically impossible nor implied its theoretical condemnation. In fact, Bentham’s science of pleasure and pain and his attempt to outline the mechanics of the human machine imply that such a technique should be sought. A technique that could be used to discover an individual’s disposition without having to rely on an individual’s behaviour would be a powerful tool in the prevention of crime. Such a technique would allow for something Hobbes though impossible—the prediction of the behaviour of the individual. The possibility of predicting individual behaviour would mean that individuals could be subjected to (re)education within the Panopticon before they had acted to harm society; and the ability to intervene before the committing of a crime would represent an even more effective protection of the greatest happiness of the greatest number.

Bentham’s new technology of power granted governments the power to intervene and cure social disease, as well as the power to define what constitutes social disease. In this way, “power” encompasses both capacity and right. In fact, in the case of Bentham’s Panopticon, it was the government’s new capacity to cure social disease that paved the way for the government’s right to do so: right no longer circumscribed capacity as was the case with Hobbes’s absolute sovereign; capacity now determined right. If the government can cure social disease, then the government should be granted the right to do so. The ground upon which governments were granted the right to subject individuals to the unremitted inspection of the Panopticon was the belief that by doing so, governments were acting in the best interest of all. In fact, when treating criminals within the Panopticon, governments were not only protecting the greatest happiness of the greatest number within society as a whole, they were also acting in the criminal’s best interest by educating him such that he, for the first time, would be able to make reasonable judgments about how to secure his own happiness.
The Panopticon is not a form of punishment that simply responds to the evil of crime through the infliction of the evil of punishment. The Panopticon, and the new form of power it represents, has the double benefit of reforming the criminal at the same time that it protects society. It is this double benefit that makes the new system of power so efficient—that is, it does not merely amplify the total amount of pain within the society—and that justifies granting governments the right to make use of this new form of power. While all previous systems of criminal law responded to the illegitimate evil of crime with the legitimized evil of punishment, this new system of criminal law responded to the illegitimate evil of crime with the legitimized good of education and reform.

In this respect, Bentham’s new technology marked a radical break with Hobbes’s understanding of the relationship between the individual and political power. Hobbes had made a sharp distinction between the sovereign’s capacities and the sovereign’s authority. The authority of the sovereign, Hobbes argued, could only come from the individual. For Hobbes, the preservation of life was the basis of the sovereign’s authority; and if and when a sovereign did not or could not preserve life, an individual’s political obligations were dissolved. Bentham’s new technology, while not eliminating the distinction between capacity and right, shifted the political implication of the distinction. The individual was no longer the basis of the government’s rights; it was the greatest happiness of the greatest number. The individual was related to political power to the extent that the individual either enhanced or detracted from the greatest happiness of the greatest number. Those who detracted from the greatest happiness of the greatest number were to become the legitimate targets of a type of regulation that was based upon the science of pleasure and pain. Bentham thus provided the foundation for and justification of a new type of power. Bentham, like Hobbes, established a new framework for understanding and justifying political power that would prove to be extremely flexible. By linking the disposition with the behaviour of the individual, and by arguing that dispositions could be transformed, Bentham justified an unprecedented type of social engineering as the right of governments. But Bentham’s exploration of the possible
implications of the new power he was granting governments was quite limited. On the one hand, Bentham was preoccupied with issues of crime and punishment—a preoccupation that caused Bentham to focus almost exclusively on the distinction between criminals and non-criminals. Bentham was not really interested in pursuing whether other social distinctions could or should be made on the basis of disposition. On the other hand, Bentham did not see the potential implications of connecting physiology and disposition. After Bentham, the terminology of race would be increasingly linked to physiology and defined not in terms of ignorance but of speciation. The terminology of race thus served to promote the notion that physiological differences were differences in kind, and this understanding of race would be used to solidly entrench an idea foreign to the spirit of Bentham’s philosophy—the idea of the life that did not deserve to live. As I outlined in Transition A, the notion of the life that did not deserve to live was articulated by Locke, and this notion overcame the tensions and antinomies between the rights of the individual and the rights of the sovereign present in Hobbes's political philosophy. As I also outlined in Transition A, Bentham rejected this idea. Bentham argued that because individuals can be reclaimed, even if the sovereign has the right to do so, the sovereign should not inflict death to protect the body politic; the new power of mind over mind made the sovereign’s right to inflict death obsolete. In the next, and final part of my thesis, I turn to the philosophy of Michel Foucault to explore how the logic of Bentham’s political philosophy was radicalized in much the same way that Bentham radicalized the logic of Hobbes's political philosophy. Bentham’s science of pleasure and pain, and the social engineering made possible by this science, became the basis for a new distinction between the friends and the enemies of the body politic. The logic of Bentham’s understanding of the distinction between different kinds of life was used to justify not only increasingly sophisticated types of social regulation, but also, in extreme cases, the death of not only an individual but entire groups.
'Life is a very wonderful thing,' said Doctor Branom in a like very holy goloss. 'The processes of life, the make-up of the human organism, who can fully understand these miracles? Dr Brodsky is, of course, a remarkable man. What is happening to you now is what should happen to any healthy human organism contemplating the actions of the forces of evil, the workings of the principle of destruction. You are being made sane, you are being made healthy.'

Anthony Burgess, *A Clockwork Orange*
Foucault approached the analysis of power from a different perspective than did Hobbes or Bentham. Hobbes and Bentham wanted to increase power's efficacy by building new machines of power—the Leviathan and the Panopticon. Foucault, on the other hand, did not want to build but to tear down such machines. Foucault, in this respect, was directly opposed to Hobbes and Bentham. But in spite of this opposition, Foucault shared some of their conceptual frameworks. Foucault was drawn to the question of power because he, like Hobbes, rejected the possibility of explaining human behaviour in terms of metaphysical, divine, or even objective principles. Power, rather than an objective truth, is the final arbiter of human affairs. Foucault breaks with Hobbes, however, on the question of life. For Hobbes, life was “given”, a brute fact that cannot be transformed by power. According to Foucault, life is not independent of, but an object manipulated and constructed by, power. In this respect, Foucault followed Bentham’s radicalization of Hobbes. Bentham had claimed that to understand life scientifically was to make possible the manipulation of life; all that was needed was the proper technology, which was, according to Bentham, supplied by the Panopticon. Foucault saw Bentham’s Panopticon as the archetype of a new form of power that had come to dominate the modern world. And, Foucault argued, this new form of power must become the object of philosophical inquiry if we are to (i) understand the enormous cost of this new form of power and (ii) free ourselves from its effects.

Hobbes and Bentham had theorized the relation between life and power because they wanted to develop a type of power that would serve life best. Hobbes had urged the building of the Leviathan because it could produce peace and, in so doing, secure individual self-preservation; Bentham had urged the building of the Panopticon because it would, by reforming those who refused to submit to social pleasures and pains, facilitate the greatest
happiness of the greatest number. Foucault's investigation of power did not follow the models established by Hobbes's and Bentham's political projects. To focus on the goals of power was, Foucault argued, to ignore the most fundamental effect of power—the exact way in which power touches the individual. Accordingly, Foucault chose to focus his own investigation of power not on the goals of power but on the effects of power on the individual. Foucault, stating that this choice was in direct contrast to Hobbes, said:

Think of the scheme of Leviathan: insofar as he is a fabricated man, Leviathan is no other than the amalgamation of a certain number of separate individuals ... [A]t the heart of the State, or rather, at its head, there exists something that constitutes it as such, and this is sovereignty, which Hobbes says is precisely the spirit of Leviathan. Well, rather than worry about the central spirit, I believe that we must attempt to study the myriad of bodies which are constituted as peripheral subjects as a result of the effects of power. (PK, p. 98)

Hobbes believed individuals were the atoms out of which the body politic was assembled. But Hobbes did not study the individual in an attempt to ascertain exactly how power touched the individual; he did so to determine exactly how sovereignty should be constructed to effectively govern individuals. Hobbes made the methodological choice to focus his investigation of power on the construction of sovereignty. Foucault's study of power, instead of attempting to imagine what power should be, attempted to capture the actual effects of power on the individual. This choice to focus on the individual was necessary, argued Foucault, if the costs of power in the modern world were to be accurately assessed.

For Foucault, the focus on the individual was not simply a methodological choice; it was also an attempt to get outside of what he saw as the logic that guided modern political philosophy. Foucault argued that the way the relations between the individual and the body politic had been framed by modern political philosophy established a certain dangerous sensibility. Modern political philosophy tended to privilege the sovereign or body politic over the individual, and this privileging turned the individual into a problem. Hobbes, as I have outlined, had drawn attention to the "problem" of the individual by placing a theoretically irresolvable antinomy at the heart of the body politic: the natural right to self-preservation
Part 3: Foucault

ensured that no matter how perfect the sovereign, the individual’s rights could never be completely integrated into a well-ordered body politic. But, while Hobbes saw this antinomy as a brute fact of government, the enlightenment “utopians” of the seventeenth century and the “very real administrators” of the eighteenth century wanted to overcome the rupture between natural right and order represented by Hobbes’s antinomy. In fact, Foucault claimed that “modern political rationality” was entirely devoted to the construction of a project capable of fully reconciling individual rights with order (DE4, p. 827).¹ The attempt to reconcile right and order, Foucault insisted, could “only take the form of an integration of right into the order of the state” (DE4, p. 828). From Foucault’s perspective, Locke’s radicalization of Hobbes could be seen as such an attempt. Locke’s radicalization of Hobbes’s understanding of life allowed natural right to be redefined such that it became subservient to political order. The rights of the individual were no longer dependent upon the individual’s biological existence, as Hobbes had argued, but upon the individual’s place within the body politic: a criminal, a “dangerous beast”, did not and could not have the same rights as a law-abiding citizen. The dangerous individual, Locke insisted, had forfeited his right to life. Bentham added a twist to Locke’s radicalization of Hobbes by arguing that while the state had the right to put the dangerous individual to death, the state should not exercise this right; instead, the state can and should make the individual the object of a new political technology that made possible the manipulation of life. The attempt to reconcile right and order thus culminated in the articulation of the idea of a life that does not deserve to life (i.e., Locke) and in the construction of technologies of power that could be used to inspect and manipulate the individual (i.e., Bentham). According to Foucault, power in the modern world is a perverse blend of these two attempts to reconcile right and order; in the name of preserving life power can be used to inspect and manipulate the individual with incredible

¹This and all subsequent citations of Dites et écrites are my own translation.
rigour and, in the extreme case, to bring about the death of the life that does not deserve to live.

Foucault’s investigation of power was not characterized by the same unity of vision as were Hobbes’s and Bentham’s. In fact, Foucault’s oeuvre is characterized by a lack of unity because, in a sense, Foucault’s project was really two different projects: (i) the attempt to investigate the historical evolution and detailed workings of modern power; and (ii) the attempt to find ways to resist and escape modern power. Foucault’s oeuvre can be divided chronologically based upon these two different projects. From 1961 to 1976, Foucault attempted to detail the history and workings of modern power in, for example, *Madness and Civilization* and *Discipline and Punish*, and from 1976 to 1984 Foucault explored how to escape modern power in the three-volume *History of Sexuality*. In the first period, Foucault examined institutional arrangements of power (i.e., mental asylums, hospitals, prisons). Foucault referred to these institutions as “technologies of power” and suggested that these technologies, like Bentham’s Panopticon, employed unremitted inspection and the manipulation of physiology to produce “normalized” subjects. In this first period, Foucault looked at the individual as an object whose identity was produced by these new technologies of power. In this first period, then, power had priority over questions of subjectivity and identity. In the second period, however, Foucault’s focus on this relationship between power and identity was reversed. In attempting to outline how the individual could escape the normalizing effects of power, Foucault turned to investigating how the individual participates in his own self-formation through what he called the “techniques of the self”. The techniques of the self, Foucault argued, were the ways in which individuals worked on themselves to form and solidify their identities. Foucault suggested that the techniques of the self made it
possible for the individual to work on himself to subvert the normalizing process carried out by the technologies of power. But though Foucault explored both the technologies of power and the techniques of the self in detail, he never provided a sustained or convincing account of the exact relation between the two. In fact, Foucault’s writings about the technologies of power seem to leave little room for anything like the techniques of the self, and Foucault’s writings about the techniques of the self rarely mention the technologies of power. There exists a gap, then, between Foucault’s two projects, and this gap is, I believe, quite significant. I want to suggest that the gap between Foucault’s analyses of the technologies of power and the techniques of the self is neither the result of Foucault’s idiosyncrasies, nor a result of, as Charles Taylor and Jürgen Habermas have claimed, a fundamental contradiction built into the structure of Foucault’s philosophy. Instead, I will argue that the gap between Foucault’s two projects reflects a certain confusion that exists within modernity itself, resulting from the effects of the development of the relation between life and power.

The confusion I have in mind is a certain confusion about the status of identity. In a sense, the unique feature of modernity is its answer to the question of identity. Hobbes was certainly not the first political philosopher to claim that the question “Who am I, and why do I act as I do?” was the fundamental political question; but Hobbes’s answer to this question was quite novel. Because of my physiology, Hobbes explained, I am a curious animal moved by ideas about pleasure and pain and a desire for self-preservation. Bentham radicalized Hobbes, shifting the grounds of identity. According to Bentham, even though Hobbes was correct in identifying pleasure and pain as the basic units of identity, identity was not grounded in nature but convention. Most people are children of their own time, unconsciously gravitating toward the pleasures and pains that animate those around them;
identity, then, is a social phenomenon. But Bentham also argued that if and when necessary, political power can be used to alter an individual’s identity. If an individual fails to unconsciously internalize the pleasures and pains of society as a whole, political power can be used to destroy the individual’s anti-social identity and reconstruct the individual around a proper social identity. If governments have the technological capacity to shape the identity of the individual, then governments are no longer limited to responding to the dynamics of human motion as Hobbes had claimed, but can now actively shape these dynamics. The possibility that political power can be used to shape identity dramatically changed the status of identity. After Bentham, providing an answer to question of identity—"Who am I, and why do I act as I do?"—requires the unravelling of a certain methodological confusion: is the question of identity, as Hobbes believed, a philosophical question, or is it, as Bentham suggested, a sociological, historical, or, ultimately, political question? I believe that the gap between Foucault’s two projects reflects the profound difficulty involved in solving this methodological confusion. Foucault’s investigation of the technologies of power signalled his agreement with Bentham: power can indeed shape identity and does so by producing normalized subjects. But Foucault’s investigation of the techniques of the self signalled his hope that, in spite of power’s ability to produce identity, Hobbes was at least partially correct. Foucault hoped that even if identity was not grounded in nature, at least a part of identity was beyond the grasp of power. For, as Foucault implied, only if a part of identity is beyond the reach of the technologies of power can we hope to escape their effects. The significance of the gap between Foucault’s two projects is that even if Foucault fails to provide an answer to the question of identity, it serves to highlight one of the central questions facing us after Bentham: “Am I anything more than a product of power?”
6
Technologies of Power

THE GIFT OF SUBMISSION

Power, Foucault asserted, is never "absolutely absolute": "The movement by which a solitary individual, a group, a minority or an entire people says: 'I no longer obey', and throws in the face of a power it deems unjust the risk of its life—to me this movement appears irreducible because no power is capable of rendering it absolutely impossible" (DE3, pp. 790-791). This claim shaped Foucault’s definition of power. Foucault wrote:

Even when the power relation is completely out of balance, when it can truly be claimed that one side has “total power” over the other, a power can be exercised over the other only insofar as the other still has the option of killing himself, of leaping out the window, or of killing the other person. This means that in power relations there is necessarily the possibility of resistance because if there were no possibility of resistance (of violent resistance, flight, deception, strategies capable of reversing the situation), there would be no power relations at all. (E, p. 292)

For Foucault, the possibility of murder or suicide implied that power, no matter how massive, is always resistible. In other words, human power is never omnipotent. Like Hobbes, Foucault believed it was the mortality of the body that made omnipotence impossible; because of the permanent possibilities of murder and suicide, all systems of power have weak links that can be exploited. Foucault also echoed Hobbes’s conclusions in stating that power is always resistible. If power is always resistible, then in the final instance, power only functions because individuals are willing to accept it; power can only be effective if individuals, for whatever reason, willingly submit. Foucault was most intrigued by this willing submission. How and why do individuals grant power the gift of submission? How is it that individuals become subjects that willingly reproduce systems of power? For Foucault, the investigation of power began with the question of why we obey.

Foucault, like Hobbes, was fascinated by the weakness at the heart of power. However, Foucault and Hobbes were fascinated for altogether different reasons. Hobbes
identified power's weakness as the source of human misery. Because power is never absolutely absolute, life is a race for power that, in its most logical expression, is a war of all against all; and the artifice of politics must be used to overcome the problems born of power's weakness. Foucault, however, looked at the weakness of power from a different perspective. At the centre of Foucault's investigation of power was not the ubiquity of war but the infrequency of transgression and revolution. Why are there not, Foucault asked, more individual acts of transgression and collective acts of revolution? If power is unable to eliminate the possibility of beginning anew, what keeps individuals from acting out this dream? Whereas Hobbes had believed power to be less effective than it could be, Foucault believed power to be more effective than it should be. Yet, in spite of this sharp difference of perspective, Hobbes and Foucault began by asking the same fundamental question: What makes power powerful? Similarly, the urgency of this question, for both Hobbes and Foucault, was fuelled by a concern with order. Hobbes wanted to harness power to the pursuit of order and peace. Foucault, on the other hand, was deeply suspicious of order. Foucault was suspicious of order because of what he saw as the goal of modern political power—"normalization". Modern power, Foucault claimed, was centred on the new political category of the "normal" and the attempt to force individuals to conform to the normal. Foucault's investigation of why individuals submit to modern power thus revolved around understanding the birth and the effect of the political category of the normal.

The category of the normal was born, Foucault suggested, the moment power became capable of manipulating life. For Hobbes, life was the foundation of a new ethical framework because of life's status as a "given". Hobbes presented biological existence as the necessary condition of the good life, and the first task of politics was the protection of biological existence. Once power was given the technological capacity to manipulate life, however, biological existence no longer offered any ethical guidance. Instead, the political definition of life was separated from biological existence to be linked to an ideal. Life was defined as a certain type of behaviour, a particular way of life, even as specific genetic traits—all of which
Part 3: Foucault

were declared to be normal. The concept of life, then, no longer applied directly to each individual. Only individuals who approximated the norm were granted the rights of life. Individuals who did not approximate the norm, on the other hand, were stripped of these rights. The idea of the norm necessitated such a division because upon the appearance of the norm, the goal of power became the entrenchment and protection of the norm. To protect the normal, power had to either transform or eliminate the pathological. This new task of power was at the heart of what Foucault identified as the strange logic of modernity: in the service of life (i.e., the normal) power has been granted the right and the duty to declare war on life (i.e., the pathological). While Hobbes could never have accepted such a logic, by uniting life and power Hobbes had taken the first step toward its development. Foucault's project was to trace exactly how and why Hobbes's joining of life and power came to be united with the concepts of the normal and the pathological.

NORMALIZING POWER

The norm, Foucault argued, transformed the most basic political principles. For Hobbes, power was essentially conservative, having the dual and sometimes contradictory task of conserving the individual's life and of conserving the institutions needed for the maintenance of peace. The norm, however, changed power from an essentially conservative into an essentially productive force. Power had the task of not only protecting life, but also of shaping and cultivating life. This task of shaping and cultivating life was an endless process that Foucault called a normative or normalizing project. As Foucault explained: “the norm brings with itself at the same time a principle of qualification and a principle of correction. The norm does not have as its function to exclude, to reject. On the contrary, it is always linked to a positive technique of intervention and transformation, to a type of normative project” (A, p. 46). The norm could serve as a principle of classification because the norm did not represent a state of being but a continuum from the normal to the pathological.

---

1This and all subsequent citations of Les anormaux are my own translation.
Individuals, then, were to be classified according to where they fell along the continuum of the normal to the pathological. It was an individual’s place along this continuum that determined whether or not an individual stood in need of correction; insofar as the ideal of the norm highlighted the pathological, this ideal showed who had to be reformed or destroyed to protect life. It is this process of (i) classification and (ii) reformation or destruction that Foucault referred to as the normative project. The norm thus changed the goal of politics from the defence of order and security to the attempt to actualize the norm by correcting the pathological. It was in this respect, Foucault argued, that the norm was “an element from which a certain exercise of power was grounded and legitimized” (A, p. 46).

Foucault argued that the birth of the norm could be seen most clearly in the “epistemological shift” that separated the “classical age” (1600-1800) from the “modern age” (1800 to present). Foucault traced the historical development of the normal and the pathological by examining the “human sciences” that, he argued, were born in the modern age. These human sciences attempted to understand madness, disease, criminality, and sexuality in terms of the normal and the pathological. Foucault argued that medicine and psychiatry were the human sciences most directly connected to the development of politics as a normative project. For example, Foucault argued that modern medicine represented a completely different way of seeing disease than the medicine of the classical age. Classical medicine had granted disease an ontological status and had developed tables—nosologies and nosographies—that organized disease into different species. Modern medicine, on the other hand, divided life into a spectrum of the normal and the pathological and developed techniques whereby each type of life could be studied: anatomy studied the normal
Part 3: Foucault

physiology of the human body; pathological anatomy studied the pathological physiology of the human body. Modern medicine, then, no longer viewed disease—the pathological—as something other than life, but as a particular, albeit morbid, manifestation of life. Foucault claimed that this shift gave rise to the belief that:

Medicine must no longer be confined to a body of techniques for curing ills and of the knowledge that they require; it will also embrace a knowledge of healthy man, that is, a study of non-sick man and a definition of the model man. In the ordering of human existence it assumes a normative posture, which authorizes it not only to distribute advice as to healthy life, but also to dictate the standards for physical and moral relations of the individual and of the society in which he lives. (BC, p. 34)

Upon embracing the norm and developing techniques whereby both the normal and the pathological became objects of knowledge, modern medicine was no longer the simple art of healing but an art of cultivating the norm. Modern medicine, by providing a scientific account of the "model man", aided the entrenchment of the normative project: because modern medicine scientifically justified the image of the model man. Modern psychology, following medicine, attempted to open the human mind to the same scientific scrutiny that medicine had brought to bear on the body. Modern psychology was born at the moment that madness was “perceived less in relation to delusion than in relation to regular, normal behaviour” with the result that madness “appears no longer as disturbed judgement but as a disorder in one’s way of acting, of willing, of experiencing passions, of making decisions, and of being free" (E, p. 42). Madness thus became a form of the pathological. An individual was declared mad if and when the individual was deemed to employ her freedom in an abnormal manner. Psychiatry, like medicine, became a way in which the normal and the pathological were

---

Foucault argued that this was only accomplished once death was taken to be the natural outcome of life. In other words, the integration of the norm into medical science demanded that life be defined in terms of mortality. Only once life was conceptualized as an epiphenomena that distinguishes itself from the inorganic only for a short time and that is always tending towards the inorganic, can life be opened up to the norm. The norm thus required the formulation of the following argument: “It is not because he falls ill that man dies; fundamentally, it is because he may die that man may fall ill” (BC, p. 155).
enveloped within a scientific framework that had as its goal the elaboration of model man and the development of techniques whereby those falling short of the ideal could be treated.

The scientific codification of the norm by the human sciences gave rise to social and political transformations. Foucault included among these transformations the great projects of reform undertaken in the nineteenth century (of which Bentham’s Panopticon is one example): the transfer of the mad out of dungeons into mental asylums; the replacement of torture by imprisonment; the centralization of medical treatment in the hospital. The reformation of the mental asylum, prison, and hospital should not be seen, Foucault argued, in terms these institutions being rendered more humane, but in terms of new organizations of power being constructed to serve the project of normalization. The reorganization of institutions like the mental asylum, prison, and hospital served to protect the norm by isolating the pathological. Foucault claimed that, in their attempt to segregate the pathological, these institutions took as their model the “rituals of exclusion” that had, in a previous age, developed around the leper (DP, p. 198; A, pp. 40-45. Cf., MC, p. 7). But in these new spaces of exclusion the pathological individual was not, like the leper, “left to his doom in a mass among which it was useless to differentiate” (DP, p. 198). The pathological individual was instead inserted into a space of exclusion rigorously organized around several distinctions: (i) the type of, (ii) the intensity of, and (iii) the corrigibility of the pathology. Foucault suggested that to understand this rigorous organization one should not look only to the rituals of exclusion that surrounded the leper but also to what Foucault called “the political dream of the plague” (DP, pp. 197-198). Towns in which the plague was discovered became the objects of a particular spacial organization: such towns were partitioned, movement in and out of the town was strictly regulated, and complex systems of observation were established so that the authorities could monitor the progress of the disease. The dream inspired by the plague was the possibility of creating an “enclosed, segmented space,

---

5See also Michel Foucault. Histoire de la Folie à l’âge Classique. pp. 13-18.
observed at every point, ... in which the slightest movements are supervised, in which all events are recorded, ... in which each individual is constantly located, examined and distributed among the living beings, the sick and the dead" (DP, p. 197). Foucault claimed that within the new spaces of the mental asylum, prison, and hospital, this dream was actualized. Those who were segregated because they were classified as pathological were not to remain a homogenous group; they had to be rigorously sub-divided to the point of individuation, because only individuation would allow for the development of treatments that could restore the norm. Foucault insisted that all of the new technologies of power that grew up around the norm combined segregation (i.e., rituals of exclusion) and rigorous observation and individuation (i.e., the political dream of the plague); according to the logic of the norm, "lepers are treated as plague victims" (DP, p. 199). It was this assessment of the new technologies of power that caused Foucault to draw attention to Bentham’s Panopticon. “Bentham’s Panopticon,” Foucault claimed, “is the architectural figure of this composition” (DP, p. 200). The Panopticon was the perfect description of the space within which the pathological was not only segregated but also became an object that was to be continually observed, and, on the basis of this observation, regulated and corrected.

This dual task of segregating and classifying served, according to Foucault, as the guiding thread for the development of new technologies of power. Foucault explained that when looking back on the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries:

We are in the habit ... of saying that the greatest invention ... was the steam engine ... but there was a whole series of other technological innovations as important as the former ... there was a whole innovation at the level of power through the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. (DE4, p. 191)

Foucault spoke about these innovations at the level of power as the invention and refining of new “political technologies” that could be used in the extension of the norm. These political technologies were developed to facilitate the governing of individuals in accordance with the logic of the normal and the pathological. Foucault insisted that to understand how these political technologies functioned, it was necessary to see the infinitive “to govern” in its most
general sense. Foucault stated that "when one sees what power is, it is the exercise of something that one could call government in a very wide sense of the term. ... When I say 'govern someone,' it is simply in the sense that one can determine one's behaviour in terms of a strategy by resorting to a number of tactics" (FL, p. 410). The new political technologies that concerned Foucault had the normal as the basis of their strategies, and these technologies attempted to develop tactics that could be used to encourage individuals to willingly submit to the norm (i.e., Bentham's manipulation of sensation). It was these tactics that interested Foucault, because, as he argued, these tactics were unique in their capacities. The technological innovations of power gave power new possibilities in relation to life, and the exploitation of life marked the defining characteristic of the modern age.

DISCIPLINE AND BIO-POWER

Foucault identified two major political technologies that emerged in the wake of the norm—"discipline" and "bio-power". Both of these technologies were attempts to make life an object of power by absorbing life into the scope of power. To begin with discipline, Foucault argued that it was a political technology designed to touch the body of the individual. Discipline was an "anatomo-power" that sought to dissect and recombine the body in order to render it congruent with the norm. To illustrate what he had in mind, Foucault turned to a seemingly odd example—military manuals of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. For Foucault, these manuals were concise expressions of how the individual body was to be disciplined. In these manuals the body was portrayed as a machine, and each of its movements were divided into minute and precise segments. These divisions were used to develop drills and regimes of training that were to transform the individual's body into the body of a soldier. Foucault, to make clear the precision with which the body was divided, cited military ordinances that outlined in amazing detail how, for example, the body was to be trained to march or to handle a rifle (DP, pp. 151, 153).6 This procedure for training the

---

6For example, regarding marching, Foucault wrote that in military manuals, "The act is broken down into its elements; the position of the body, limbs, articulations is defined; to each movement are
body, Foucault argued, implied that "the soldier had become something that can be made; out of a formless clay, an inapt body, the machine required can be constructed" (DP, p. 135). At a more general level, Foucault argued, the rigour of these military manuals signalled that "an art of the human body was born" (DP, p. 137). The human body had become a material ("formless clay") that those with the proper knowledge could manipulate. This art of the human body relied on science's ability to penetrate the body's most intimate details and show how these details could be used to develop methods for disciplining the body. In the case of military manuals, the body was to be taught to perform military manoeuvres with the maximum efficiency; but the techniques of discipline extended far beyond the military context into all areas of life. The techniques of discipline, like Bentham's Panopticon, were so powerful precisely because they could be employed in almost any context imaginable.

Foucault argued that along with military barracks, mental asylums, prisons, schools, and hospitals were reorganized around the possibilities of discipline. In each of these settings, experts followed similar procedures in the attempt to use the technology of discipline to enforce the norm: individuals were first codified and divided based on the extent to which they approximated the norm; individuals were then, based on their classification, subjected to particular drills and examinations that were used in their training; last, individuals were continually monitored and, depending on whether or not they were progressing toward the norm, were recodified and, in turn, subjected to new and increasingly complex forms of training. The overall goal of these techniques of discipline was the creation of a "docile body"—a body that, through training, became more useful to society because it became more
obedient to the norm. A disciplined body was a body that, of its own accord, embodied the norm; in the ideal form, the disciplined body was animated by ‘muscle memory’ rather than consciousness. In other words, discipline, if properly used, severed the link between power and consciousness that Hobbes had insisted upon. Through the technology of discipline, power, in order to be effective, no longer had to rely upon whether or not an individual recognized its authority. Instead:

relations of power were able to pass materially into the density of the body itself without having to be relayed by the representations of subjects. If power reaches the body, it is not because it had first been internalized in the consciousness of individuals. (DE3, p. 231)

Discipline, Foucault wrote, thus “increases the forces of the body (in economic terms of utility) and diminishes these same forces (in political terms of obedience). In short, it dissociated power from the body” (DP, p. 138). Discipline dissociated power from the body because it domesticated the body; the body became a product of power rather than, as Hobbes had argued, a permanent site of resistance to power.7 Discipline programmed the body to become an instrument in the overall machinery of power and, by doing so, the technology of discipline dramatically extended the scope of power beyond what Hobbes could have imagined.

Foucault claimed that the second major technological innovation—bio-power—had a more general target than did discipline. Whereas discipline located the norm within the individual body, bio-power located the norm within the species or the race. Discipline was an individualized power tailored to the specificity of individuals. For bio-power, however, the individual was an abstraction. The population, rather than the individual, was the object of bio-power, and bio-power only touched the individual with respect to his position within the

---

7For Hobbes, the concept of a “docile body” would be absurd. While an individual might be “domesticated” in and through education, the body itself never becomes docile. The body, because of its very nature, always threatens to overcome or even unravel an individual’s education. It was because of the body that Hobbes argued the process of domestication is never complete, which is why the sword always remains a necessary political tool.
population as a whole. In this way, bio-power allowed the population to become an entity of its own, and the dynamics of the population became an object of intense scientific interest. Foucault argued that bio-power:

focused on the species body, the body imbued with the mechanics of life and serving as the basis of the biological processes; propagation, births and mortality, the level of health, life expectancy and longevity, with all the conditions that can cause these to vary. Their supervision was effected through an entire series of interventions and regulatory controls: a bio-politics of the population. (HSI, p. 139)

The species body or the population represented the most general rhythms of life. These general rhythms could not be found directly in the individual because they occurred on a slower time-line and on a larger scope than the individual life. The rhythms of the population could only be discovered through the statistical analysis of rates of birth and death, levels of wealth, and standards of health. But though the population was an entity larger than the individual, the population was also seen as an entity composed of individuals; the body of the population was a collectivity of individual bodies. Foucault claimed that this understanding of the population had a profound political effect, which could be seen by comparing the body of the population to the earlier and very similar description of the body politic best captured on the frontispiece of Hobbes’s Leviathan. On the frontispiece of the Leviathan, the body of the sovereign is represented as composed of tiny individuals—atoms that have, through the application of political power, found themselves united. The difference between this representation of the body politic and that of the population is that, whereas the body politic is the product of political power, the population exists prior to and independent of political power. The government is not responsible for the creation of but the cultivation of the population. This difference led to a dramatic change in the understanding of political power. The logic of government was no longer linked to the creation of the body politic but to the cultivation of the population, and the government, as the custodian of the population, “has as its purpose not the act of government itself, but the welfare of the population, the improvement of its condition, the increase of its wealth, longevity, health, etc” (Gov, p. 100).
Chapter 6: Technologies of Power

Upon the appearance of the population, governments were to be judged not with respect to the individual and the rights of the individual but according to the government's relation with the population; the task of governing became the nurturing of the population.8

According to Foucault, life at the level of the population emerged as the guiding thread of the project of normalization. The determination of the normal and the pathological was linked to the statistical analysis of the population: to prove that a behaviour, way of life, or genetic trait was normal, one had to show statistically that it benefited the population as a whole; to show that a behaviour, way of life, or genetic trait was pathological, one had to show statistically that it harmed the population as a whole. The way in which the technologies of power were to objectify and manipulate an individual was determined by the individual's position within the continuum of the normal and the pathological. What is the individual's place within the population as a whole: does the individual represent a threat to the ideal state of the population and, if so, can the individual be rehabilitated? The individual was thereby placed in a new relation to power. In the older representation of the body politic the relation between the individual and power was determined by the categories of “friend” and “enemy”. Friends of the state were subjects who obeyed the sovereign's laws and who thereby deserved the protection of the sovereign; enemies of the state were either subjects of a hostile sovereign or subjects guilty of treason who, by attacking the sovereign, deserved to die. The logic of the population, on the other hand, was determined by the categories of the normal and the pathological; the normal individual is a friend of the population, and the pathological individual is an enemy of the population. “Of course,” Foucault remarked, “in a certain sense, this is only a biological extrapolation of the theme of the political enemy” (DS,

8Jean-Jacques Rousseau offered one of the most amazing expressions of this new logic of governing. “All other things being equal,” Rousseau explained, “the government under which ... the citizens become populous and multiply the most, is infallibly the best government. That government under which a populace diminishes and dies out is the worst. Calculators, it is now up to you. Count, measure, compare” (Jean Jacques Rousseau. On the Social Contract. p. 191).
This similarity, however, conceals an immense difference. There are, in fact, two different enemies of the population: (i) those who can become normal, and (ii) those who can never become normal. It is the second type of enemy of the population that, like the political enemy, deserves to die. But unlike the death of the political enemy—a death which is necessary to preserve political order and stability—the death of the enemy of the population is not linked directly to “personal security”. The enemy of the population must die because, “the death of the other, the death of the bad race, of the inferior (or degenerate, or abnormal) race, is that which will make life in general more healthy; more healthy and more pure” (DS, p. 228). The difference between the political enemy and the enemy of the population can be discerned when, in the modern world, “Wars are no longer waged in the name of the sovereign who must be defended; they are waged on behalf of the existence of everyone; entire populations are mobilized for the purposes of wholesale slaughter in the name of life necessity: massacres have become vital. It is as managers of life and survival, of bodies and race, that so many regimes have been able to wage so many wars, causing so many men to be killed” (HSI, p. 137). The continuum of the normal and the pathological thus allowed the idea of the life which does not deserve to live to assume a position at the very heart of the logic of government; to protect the population, governments must be ruthless toward the pathological that cannot be made normal.

“The norm,” Foucault said, “is equally able to apply itself to a body that one wants to discipline, as to a population one wants to regulate” (DS, p. 225). But even though it straddled the individual and the population, the norm was definitely rooted in the population; the population served as the source of the norm and determined how the norm would be

---

9 This and all subsequent citations of Il faut défendre la société are my own translation.

10 Foucault maintained that by the middle of the eighteenth century, bio-power had completely usurped the logic of governing. He argued that even with revolutionary movements, “what was demanded and what served as an objective was life, understood as the basic needs, man’s concrete essence, the realization of his potential, the plenitude of the possible” (HSI, 145). In other words, even revolutionary movements accepted that bio-power was the only meaningful rationale of governing.
applied to the individual. The consequence of rooting the norm in the population was that life, in and of itself, was no longer defined in terms of biological existence. Because of the norm, life became an ideal rather than an attribute individuals possess by virtue of biological existence; life was something to which one must aspire, and of which one might fall short. How the normal population is defined thus determined the relation between a particular individual and life. An individual who falls short of the norm is found to be in the paradoxical position of having a biological existence that should not be defined as life and that may, from the standpoint of the normal population, even be antithetical to life. At the level of the population, the norm is used to fragment the species into “that which should live and that which should die” (DS, p. 227) and to justify this fragmentation by invoking the health of the population. Bio-power located the individual within the larger context of the species, and it organized the relations between individuals and the relation between individuals and power based on the extent to which an individual was deemed to help or to hinder the progress of the species. This development of the idea of the normal, Foucault argued, made racism an essential feature of modern politics. The procedure of cultivating the population through the transformation or the elimination of the pathological created a racism that was and is a “racism of the state: a racism which a society will exercise on itself, on its own elements, on its own products; an internal racism, that of a permanent purification, which will be one of the fundamental dimensions of social normalization” (DS, p. 53). Modern power is essentially racist because its essence is the definition and the destruction of the life that does not deserve to live.

The appearance of the life that does not deserve to live as a central political category transformed the relation between the individual and political power and also entirely politicized the life of the individual. To highlight the radical nature of these changes, Foucault compared the logic of the new technologies of power to the techniques of governing that had surrounded “the classical theory of sovereignty” (DS, p. 214). Foucault claimed that one of the “fundamental attributes” of sovereign power was the sovereign’s possession of “a
right of life and death" (DS, p. 214). As I argued earlier, Hobbes’s political philosophy represented a challenge to this sovereign right because he argued that the sovereign did not possess an uncontested right to inflict death. But Foucault argued there was another challenge to the understanding of sovereign power as “a right to life and death”, which only became visible with the development of the new technologies of power. Foucault argued that when it was originally articulated, the sovereign’s right to life and death was burdened by a lack of symmetry; the sovereign’s right to life and death really amounted to the power to, “make die [faire mourir] and let live [laisser vivre]” (DS, p. 214). In other words, the sovereign only exercised a right to life insofar as he had the ability to “make death”; it was only, “at the moment when the sovereign is able to kill that he exercise his right over life. It is essentially the right of the sword” (DS, p. 214). The sovereign, then, only possessed power over life to the extent that the sovereign held the right—and the ability—to inflict death. The appearance of the technologies of discipline and bio-power, however, brought with them the ability to “make life” [faire vivre]. Power no longer exercised itself over life merely through the ability to end life, but also through the ability to manipulate life. These technologies thus changed the dynamics of government. The relation between power and life was no longer limited to the use of death to maintain order, but was extended to include the ability to shape life. And, Foucault argued, with the appearance of the technologies of discipline and bio-power, making life rather than inflicting death became the anchor, as well as the purpose of government. However, even if making life became the goal of government, this did not remove the government’s right to make death: governments retained the right to destroy the life that could not be normalized. This had the effect of transforming the individual from a “subject of law” armed with rights and bound by obligations into a “subject of regulation” who could be shaped in accordance with the normal and the pathological. “I do not mean to say,” Foucault qualified, “that the law fades into the background or that the institutions of justice tend to disappear, but rather that the law operates more and more as a norm, and that the judicial institution is increasingly incorporated into a continuum of apparatuses (medical,
administrative, and so on) whose functions are for the most part regulatory" (*HSI*, p. 144). In the modern age, politics is no longer the place of subjects of the law and the sovereign; it is the place of objects to be regulated in accordance with the needs of the population as determined by the continuum of the normal and the pathological. The modern age is populated by individuals who are the objects of a power deployed according to the determination of the normal and the pathological—objects whose very identity and existence are based upon the logic of the project of normalization.

Making Power Material

According to Foucault, the technologies of discipline and bio-power were not merely new ways of accomplishing traditional political goals. Nor were these technologies, "simply a way of transcribing political discourse into biological terms, nor simply a way of draping political discourse with scientific clothing" (*DS*, p. 229). Foucault insisted that these new technologies instead represented a radical change in both the logic, as well as the limits and possibilities, of the political. In terms of the logic of the political, the pathological was more than a new name for the "enemy of the state". The "enemy of the state" became an object of power because they had either transgressed the laws, or because they threatened the very existence of the state; the pathological became the object of power not because of any direct transgression of laws, or direct threat to the state, but because of its distance from the norm.¹¹ Due to the new logic of the project of normalization, the logic of politics was no longer exhausted by either the law (i.e., internal stability and order) or the preservation of the state in times of war. The logic of politics now also included the regulation of the relation between the normal and the pathological. In terms of the limits and the possibilities of politics, the connection between the norm and life created new political technologies. Power became

¹¹This is not to imply that the "enemy of the state" disappears. Foucault's argument is that the political logic that centred on the "enemy of the state" is increasingly displaced by the political logic centred on the norm. In this process of displacement, there are instances in which the "enemy of the state" remains fully intact, and instances in which the "enemy of the state" and the "abnormal" are fused.
Part 3: Foucault

For the purpose of “making life”, but, paradoxically, power also became capable of ending life—and not merely at the level of the individual but also at the level of the species. In grounding itself on life as understood in terms of the norm, politics have tended to become increasingly bloody: pathological groups and populations have to be eliminated in the name of life or in the name of preserving the norm. As the technologies of discipline and bio-power were refined, political power became increasingly capable of carrying out the widespread elimination of the pathological. Foucault wrote that, “what might be called a society’s ‘threshold of modernity’ has been reached when the life of the species is wagered on its own political strategies. For millennia, man remained what he was for Aristotle: a living animal with the additional capacity for a political existence; modern man is an animal whose politics places his existence as a living being in question” (HSI, p. 143). This is the deadly paradox at the heart of modern politics and power; governments became the guardians of the population at the same time as they gained the capacity to destroy life on a scale hitherto unimaginined.

The new technologies of discipline and bio-power did not only alter the logic and possibilities of the political; they also altered the logic and the possibilities of power. In terms of the logic of power, Foucault argued that, “Power relations are both intentional and nonsubjective” (HSI, p. 94). Power is intentional in that it is exercised according to a “series of aims and objectives”, but it is also nonsubjective because these aims and objectives are not the result of “the choice or decision of an individual subject” (HSI, p. 95). The aims and objectives of power are directed by the logic of the new technologies of power. If power is intelligible, it is because the goals of discipline and bio-power are intelligible, not because power can be linked to the plans and desires of a particular group or class. Theories that

12 Foucault wrote: “The atomic situation is now at the end point of this process: the power to expose a whole population to death is the underside of the power to guarantee an individual’s continued existence. ... If genocide is indeed the dream of modern powers, this is not because of a recent return of the ancient right to kill; it is because power is situated and exercised at the level of life, the species, the race, and the large-scale phenomena of population” (HSI, p. 137).

13 A point of clarification may be helpful. By declaring power to be “intentional but nonsubjective”, Foucault did not want to imply that there is nothing subjective about the exercise of power. For
localize power in a specific entity fail to capture the implications of the nonsubjective character of the logic of power. The logic of the norm, in and through its technological embodiment in discipline and bio-power, inscribes everyone without implicating anyone (or, conversely, implicating everyone) in its effects. To grasp the diffuse nature of this logic, it is necessary to resist seeing power as something possessed by political rulers. As Foucault put it, “We need to cut off the King’s head: in political theory that has still to be done” (*PK*, p. 121). Along with the logic of power, the possibilities of power were also transformed by the new technologies of discipline and bio-power. Through these technologies, for the first time, “power became material” (*DE4*, p. 194). Power became material because these new technologies opened at least the dream, if not the reality, of governing the individual without having to rely on consciousness. Bentham claimed he had discovered a power of mind over mind that, by manipulating the “springs and actions” of life, could bombard sensation and bypass consciousness; but discipline and bio-power, while they grew out of the same principles articulated by Bentham, have, in their most advanced forms, moved far beyond what Bentham described. Bentham remained content with discussing the transformation of ideas. Discipline and bio-power have, in their most advanced forms, abandoned the realm of ideas altogether and instead rely on governing the behaviour of individuals by manipulating life at a bio-chemical level.

The logic and the possibilities represented by the technologies of discipline and bio-power are the key to power’s effectiveness in the modern world. By engaging life at its most basic level, power came to construct a labyrinth that incorporated almost every element of the lives of individuals; nothing is too banal or too important to escape the notice of power. Incorporating all aspects of life into either disciplinary regimes or the regulations of bio-

example, a particular definition of what counts as normal and what counts as pathological can always be traced to subjectivity. What Foucault was instead arguing was that the very possibility of conceptualizing the normal and the pathological was not the result of a particular decision taken by particular individuals. In this sense, power is nonsubjective in that the logic of power precedes individuals, and subjectivity plays itself out in the context of this already established logic.
power allowed for the individual to be slowly moulded to fit within the overall regime of power. From the moment of their birth, individuals are shaped in the image of the norm by the technologies of discipline and bio-power. This, Foucault insisted, demanded a theoretical reorientation of the conception of the individual:

The individual must not, I believe, be conceived as a sort of elementary kernel, primitive atom, multiple and inert matter that power would apply itself to, or against which power would strike and subdue or crush individuals. In reality, it is precisely through one of the primitive effects of power that a body, gestures, discourses, desires are identified and constituted as individuals. That is to say, the individual is not the vis-à-vis of power; the individual is, I believe, one of power’s primitive effects. The individual is an effect of power and the individual is at the same time, to the extent that it is an effect of power, its relay: power is transmitted by the individual it has constituted. (*DS*, p. 27)

To realize the significance of this claim, one need only look back at Hobbes’s and Bentham’s conceptions of the individual. With Hobbes, the individual was a type of “primitive atom”. With Bentham, in the normal course of affairs, the individual is much the same as Hobbes described. Bentham, however, claimed to have discovered an organization of power that could disrupt the normal course of affairs; the Panopticon transformed the individual from the vis-à-vis of power into an object worked upon and constituted by power. According to Foucault, however, the invention of the new technologies of discipline and bio-power have rendered both Hobbes’s and Bentham’s conceptions of the individual inadequate. To grasp the implications of modern power one must begin with the proposition that the individual is

---

*14*Louis Althusser, who was Foucault’s teacher, in his essay “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses (Notes towards an Investigation)”, made the claim that the formation of subjectivity begins even prior to birth. Althusser wrote: “Before its birth, the child is therefore always-already a subject, appointed as a subject in and by the specific familial ideological configuration in which it is ‘expected’ once it has been conceived” (Louis Althusser. *Lenin and Philosophy*. p. 176).
the product of power. "The margin is a myth" (DE3, 77) Foucault wrote. No individual stands outside the logic or the effects of the new technologies of power.
7
Subject as Object

THE MICRO-PHYSICS OF POWER

In his description of the technologies of discipline and bio-power, Foucault attempted to show that power had come to be intricately woven into the fabric of everyday life and within the material of the body. The material nature of these new technologies had created a gap between power's theoretical weakness (i.e., the fact that power is never absolutely absolute) and the possibility of exploiting this weakness. If power is intricately woven into everyday life and the materiality of the individual, how can one identify the exact nature of the working of power? Is it possible to discern the minute details of everyday life and discover the thread of power? For Foucault, these questions were political. Foucault considered the consequences of the new technologies of power and the normalizing project to be intolerable, and he wanted to find a way to identify the workings of modern power to liberate the individual from its grasp. To do so, Foucault attempted to construct what he called a "micro-physics" of power. Foucault wanted to investigate the way in which the modern technologies of power actually touch and shape individuals; he believed that such an account was the first step toward escaping the logic of the project of normalization.

In constructing his micro-physics of power Foucault began by abandoning what he saw as several dominant but ultimately inadequate conceptions of power. Foucault argued against (i) the "repressive hypothesis" that presented power as something that essentially forbids, and (ii) the claim that, in the final analysis, power rests upon an idealistic or ideological foundation. First, regarding the repressive hypothesis, Foucault asserted that to conceive of power as something that in essence only forbids is to overlook power's
productive dimension. He argued that “power would be a fragile thing if its only function were to repress” (PK, p. 59). Instead, power gains its strength in and through the production of subjects and the production of life. Secondly, the claim that power rests upon idealistic or ideological foundations ignores the fact that modern power is characterized by its materialism, not its idealism. In working below the level of consciousness, the efficacy of modern power does not depend on either persuading or misinforming individuals. In its ideal form, modern power touches the body and life before it reaches the level of consciousness and, in this respect, modern power bypasses consciousness. Thus, to maintain an idealistic or an ideological explanation of power is to overlook the way in which modern power relates itself to the individual’s body.

In arguing against these two conceptions of power Foucault did not offer an alternative model but an alternative methodology. Foucault insisted that to investigate the micro-physics of modern power one must begin with an analysis of its particular, localized embodiments, and then move, by way of an “ascending analysis”, from these particular manifestations to the more general and abstract forms of power. As Foucault put it, in the investigation of modern power one must first look at its:

infinitesimal mechanisms, which each have their own history, their own trajectory, their own techniques and tactics, and then see how these mechanisms of power have been—and continue to be—invested, colonised, utilised, involuted, transformed, displaced, extended etc., by ever more general mechanisms and by forms of global domination. (PK, p. 99)

Foucault offered this methodology of an ascending analysis rather than a particular model of power because he insisted that when looking at power one must privilege the question “how”

---

1This is not to say that Foucault rejected the idea that power does manifest itself in prohibitions. For instance, regarding sexuality, Foucault wrote: “I do not maintain that the prohibition of sex is a ruse; but it is a ruse to make prohibition into the basic and constitutive element ... All these negative elements—defences, censorships, denials—which the repressive hypothesis groups together in one great central mechanism destined to say no, are doubtless only component parts that have a local and a tactical role to play in a transformation into discourse, a technology of power, and a will to knowledge that are far from being reducible to the former” (HSI, p. 12).
over the question "why". As he explained: "To put it bluntly, I would say that to begin the analysis with a 'how' is to suggest that power as such does not exist" (SP, p. 217). Models of power, Foucault claimed, tend to focus on the question why and therefore portray power as an entity. But power is not an essence or an entity. "One needs to be nominalistic," Foucault insisted, because "power is not an institution, and not a structure; neither is it a certain strength we are endowed with; it is the name that one attributes to a complex strategical situation in a particular society" (HSI, p. 93). Foucault's attempt to highlight the micro-physics of discipline and bio-power was his attempt to explore the complex relations that have enabled modern power to govern individuals.

THE EXTENSION OF THE NORM

As I outlined in the previous chapter, Foucault believed that the new technologies of power gave rise to new spaces—the mental asylum, the hospital, the prison. It was within these spaces, Foucault argued, that experiments in power were carried out. Discipline and bio-power were applied to individuals and, if deemed successful, these applications were slowly generalized. In this respect, the development of the technologies of discipline and bio-power was somewhat piecemeal. Successful experiments in power occurred in particular, historically identifiable places. What began in, for example, a particular prison, as an isolated and localized experiment was, once proved successful, slowly incorporated into the prison system as a whole. And if these experiments proved successful enough they moved beyond the walls of the prison into the body politic as a whole. It is in this sense that what began as an "infinitesimal mechanism" of power with its own "history" and "trajectory" became an ever more general mechanism of power, and even, eventually, a form of "global domination". By tracing this movement of power from an infinitesimal mechanism to a form of global
domination, Foucault highlighted exactly how a form of power that was capable of producing a normalized subject came to be. To look at the history of these institutions was, Foucault argued, to look at the history of how the individual was enveloped by the logic of the project of normalization.

In his analysis of the history of discipline and bio-power Foucault was most fascinated by the mental asylum and the prison. Foucault looked to these two institutions because he believed that it was there that the technologies of discipline and bio-power first touched individuals. For example, with respect to the prison Foucault stated that through “its methods of fixing, dividing, recording, it has been one of the simplest, crudest, also most concrete, but perhaps most indispensable conditions for the development of this immense activity of examination that has objectified human behaviour” (DP, p. 305). The mental asylum and the prison contained individuals upon whom experimentation could be undertaken with relative ease. Not only were the populations of mental asylums and prisons captive, but their position as the “other” cut them off from the wider society, which meant there was little resistance to their being used in experiments in power. For these reasons, Foucault argued that it was within the mental asylum and the prison that the historical appearance of the technologies of discipline and bio-power was most visible. And because of the development of the project of normalization, confinement within a mental asylum was no longer simply a means of exclusion and incarceration within a prison was no longer simply a means of punishment. These institutions became places within which the norm was to be restored; reformation, rehabilitation, and restoration were linked to and even superseded the goals of confinement and punishment. Within mental asylums and prisons, discipline and bio-power were used in the attempt to transform the pathological into the normal; the goal of
these institutions was to discover the methods by which the norm could be enforced with maximum efficiency. These experiments attempted to construct the most effective and economical technologies of power, "to alter behaviour, to train or correct individuals. ... To try out different punishments on prisoners, according to their crimes and characters, and to seek the most effective ones" (DP, p. 203). It is in this respect that Foucault regarded Bentham's Panopticon as the ideal representation of the new technologies of power. Even though Bentham's Panopticon was never built, "the Panopticon must not be understood as a dream building: it is the diagram of a mechanism of power reduced to its ideal form ..." (DP, p. 205). Bentham himself had argued that the Panopticon was a great laboratory. The scientific knowledge of human physiology and psychology provided by Bentham and the Enlightenment materialists would help develop techniques that would allow the inmates of the Panopticon to be refashioned. The inmates of mental asylums and prisons were the individuals upon whom the techniques of normalization were first employed, and, eventually, perfected.

The technologies developed in the mental asylum and the prison were based on some very simple techniques: surveillance and observation, the establishment of hierarchies, and methods of examination that treated the individual as a "case" (that is, the "individual as he may be described, judged, measured, compared with others, in his very individuality" [DP, p. 191]). In fact, the architecture of prisons, mental asylums, military camps, and factories came to reflect the need for surveillance and observation. Foucault argued that the creation of the prison Mettray in 1840 marked the perfection of these techniques of normalization. Mettray
was designed to make possible the training of its inmates.² The organization of life within Mettray involved strict hierarchies, constant observation, and the continual documentation of the individual’s progress towards the norm. Foucault wrote that it was through these techniques that “power produces; it produces reality; it produces domains of objects and rituals of truth. The individual and the knowledge that may be gained of him belong to this production” (DP, p. 194). But Foucault asked, when looking at the seeming incongruity between the simplicity of the techniques (observation, categorization, examination) and the dramatic effects he ascribed to them: “Is it not somewhat excessive to derive such power from the petty machinations of discipline? How could they achieve effects of such scope?” (DP, p. 194). How could such seemingly simple forms of organization produce an individual that was guided by the logic of the project of normalization?

Foucault attempted to answer this question by describing exactly how this new organization of life was used to form the individual. In the example of the criminal, the technologies of discipline and bio-power did not simply represent a new organization of punishment but the transformation of the criminal into a different type of object. The traditional understanding of the criminal presented him as an individual who was “designated as the enemy of all” because he “disqualifies himself as a citizen” since he is “a wild fragment of nature” (DP, p. 101). This description corresponds to Locke’s understanding of the criminal; crime is the eruption of a wild predator within the commonwealth. But

²Foucault also chose Mettray “Because Mettray was a prison, but not entirely; a prison in that contained young delinquents condemned by the courts; and yet something else, too, because it also contained minors who had been charged, but acquitted under article 66 of the code, and boarders held, as in the eighteenth century, as an alternative to parental correction. ... It was the most famous of a whole series of institutions which, well beyond the frontiers of criminal law, constituted what one might call the carceral archipelago” (DP, pp. 296-297).
Discipline and bio-power add something new to the understanding of the criminal. Discipline and bio-power fused the understanding of the criminal as an "enemy" with the understanding of the criminal as "pathological". As an example of the pathological the criminal "will belong to a scientific objectification and to the 'treatment' that is correlative to it" (DP, p. 101). Here, one approaches Bentham's understanding of the criminal—the criminal is no longer simply an enemy deserving of punishment but also a manifestation of the pathological deserving of treatment. Punishment thus becomes intermingled with the attempt to cure pathology. In this respect, the logic of normalization changed the goal of punishment from deterrence to education. But the fusing of punishment and treatment had another effect not articulated by Bentham. This fusing of punishment and treatment, Foucault argued, tended to blur the lines between judicial and extra-judicial language; on the one hand, one could speak about the criminal in terms of extra-judicial forms of treatment and, on the other hand, one could speak about non-criminal examples of pathology (i.e., race, madness, sexual behaviour) in terms of judgement and punishment.

For Foucault, the most obvious sign of the movement of the extra-judicial into the realm of the judicial was the appearance of the human sciences within the system of crime and punishment. According to Foucault, the medical doctor, the psychiatrist, and the social worker were all introduced into the judicial system as experts who were to document the precise nature of the individual criminal's pathology. The fusing of punishment and treatment meant it was no longer sufficient to judge individuals based on whether or not the alleged facts had occurred. This was still necessary, of course, but also required was a rigorous attempt to discover exactly why the individual had committed the criminal act. This requirement to understand the individual was not legal in nature but related to the project of
normalization. One had to understand the roots of the individual’s pathology if the individual was to be rehabilitated. This fusion of the juridical and the project of normalization created the following situation:

Today two systems are superimposed on one another. On the one hand, we are still living under the old traditional system which says: we punish because there is a law. And then, on top of that, a new system has penetrated the first: we punish according to the law but in order to correct, to modify, to redress; for we are dealing with deviants and the abnormal. The judge thinks of himself as a therapist of the social body, a worker in the field of ‘public health’ in the larger sense. (FL, p. 246)

The goal of crime and punishment was no longer the protection of the body politic through the execution of the laws, but also the protection of the body politic though the elimination of the pathological.

This transformation of the criminal’s status is connected to Bentham’s radicalization of Hobbes’s understanding of life. Unlike Hobbes, Bentham believed it possible to draw up a table of pleasures and pain that would reflect their social utility. Pleasures and pains that benefitted society as a whole were normal, Bentham suggested, while those that harmed society as a whole were pathological. In attempting to reform the prison system, Bentham was responding to the discovery that criminal impulses were pathological and, more importantly, that these pathological impulses could be corrected. But, as I have noted, Bentham did not encourage a universalization of the Panopticon; for Bentham, the Panopticon was a form of power to be used in unusual circumstances. However, Foucault argued that Bentham’s attempt to discourage the universalization of the Panopticon was futile. The technology of the Panopticon penetrated into society as a whole because of the desire to bring about an “organization of a field of prevention” (DP, p. 101) that would preempt the appearance and spread of the pathological. Indeed, the very logic of the project of normalization demanded such an extension. Moreover, the simplicity of the technology of the Panopticon facilitated such an extension. Bentham himself had drawn attention to this simplicity: the technology of the Panopticon was, as Bentham put it, extremely economical in terms of a cost-benefit analysis and also in terms of “political economy”. The technology of
the Panopticon extended into society as a whole as it was the most effective means of extending the logic of the normalizing project into society as a whole.

This movement of the technology of the Panopticon into society as a whole represented the movement of the judicial into the extra-judicial. Extending the techniques of the Panopticon had the profound effect of "lowering at least the threshold of tolerance to penalty" (DP, p. 301) and, by lowering this threshold, likewise lowering "the level from which it becomes natural and acceptable to be punished" (DP, p. 303). Once punishment had been linked to correction, and once criminality had given way to the more general category of the pathological, punishment was no longer something to only be administered after an illegal act; punishment could, and should, be administered in relation to all pathology. This linking of crime and the pathological can be seen in the replacement of the language of criminality by the language of deviance. Deviance, a category more general than but including criminality, was the basis upon which punishment/correction came to be applied. In all areas of life, any and all forms of deviance were to be subjected to punishment/correction. Surveillance, rigorous classification, examination, and judgement thus became techniques used everywhere to deal with the pathological. Foucault wrote:

The judges of normality are present everywhere. We are in the society of the teacher-judge, the doctor-judge, the educator-judge, the 'social worker'-judge; it is on them that the universal reign of the normative is based; and each individual, wherever he may find himself, subjects to it his body, his gestures, his behaviour, his aptitudes, his achievements. (DP, p. 304)

Given this extension of the logic of normalization into everyday life, Foucault asked, "Is it surprising that prisons resemble factories, schools, barracks, hospitals, which all resemble prisons?" (DP, p. 228). All social institutions have become informed by the goal of actualizing the norm and have thus become spaces within which the norm is to be fashioned. A double movement thus occurred: on the one hand, the extra-judicial moved into the realm of the judicial and, on the other hand, the judicial extended itself into everyday life. The
individual was to be governed by quasi-judicial judgements about who was in need of punishment/correction.

By seeping into all areas of everyday life, the norm became the basis upon which the individual was to be constructed. The individual became the object of judgments by experts who had the knowledge to identify cases of pathology and their required treatment. The psychiatrist, the medical doctor, the statistician—all came to play a larger and larger role in everyday life, both in shaping the techniques of social engineering that would actualize the norm and in ensuring that individuals slowly internalized the logic of the norm. The relation between experts and individuals became very effective: as individuals came to accept the authority of these experts, individuals came to actively participate in the extension of the logic of the norm. Individuals were taught to rely on the knowledge of experts, and as that trust in experts solidified, the normalizing judgement became increasingly natural. Through the use of experts in the extension of the norm there was, “No need of weapons, of physical violence, of material constraints. Only a gaze. A gaze which surveys and that, in feeling its weight upon them, each will end up internalizing to the extent of observing himself; thus each will exercise this surveillance over and against himself” (DE3, p. 198). In this respect, the role of experts was solidified in a way that resembled Hobbes’s notions of authorization and persuasion. The medical doctor and the psychiatrist, because they were viewed as having a knowledge of the normal and the pathological, were given the authority to act as the enforcers of the normalizing project.

THE DISCIPLINED INDIVIDUAL

According to Foucault, “Discipline is the political anatomy of detail” (DP, p. 139). In the construction of the individual, the technologies of discipline and bio-power utilize the most intimate details of the body to produce what Foucault referred to as a “soul”. The soul consisted of the gestures, thoughts, and ways of life that the individual was disciplined to recognize as normal. “It would be wrong to say,” Foucault claimed, “that the soul is an illusion, or an ideological effect. On the contrary, it exists, it has a reality, it is produced
permanently around, on, within the body by the functioning of a power" (*DP*, p. 29). In short, the soul was inscribed in the materiality of the body. Reversing a much older maxim, Foucault insisted that “the soul is the prison of the body” (*DP*, p. 30). Foucault, writing about mental asylums, described the three steps involved in the formation of the soul:

first, the formation of a domain of recognitions (*connaissances*) that constitute themselves as specific knowledge (*savior*) of ‘mental illness’; second, the organization of a normative system built on a whole technical, administrative, juridical, and medical apparatus whose purpose was to isolate and take custody of the insane; and finally, the definition of a relation to oneself and to others as possible subjects of madness. (*E*, p. 202)

The science of psychology attempted to (i) classify the different types of mental illness, (ii) isolate the causes of these mental illnesses, and (iii) use this knowledge of mental illness to develop methods of treatment. It was based on this science that individuals were classified and placed within an institution designed to treat their pathology. If the first two stages were successful then the individual would finally come to understand herself in a specific way. The individual will understand exactly why she has been classified as pathological and, to a certain degree, become autonomous from the expert; the individual will have been taught how to recognize her pathology, and how to respond if and when this pathology begins to manifest itself. The end result of the process, then, is the formation of an individual who is self-policing in relation to the normal and the pathological. The construction of the soul amounts to the production of an individual who has been fully informed by the logic of the normal and the pathological, and who acts in accordance with this knowledge. The normalized individual is the individual who has emerged from the processes of discipline and bio-power as an individual capable of detecting the pathological, and willing to take the necessary steps toward its elimination.

This process of constructing a normalized individual placed the individual at the centre of what Foucault referred to as a “carceral archipelago,” or a “carceral network”.  

---

1Foucault employed a similar rhetorical tactic in *Madness and Civilization*. In the Preface of *Madness and Civilization* Foucault wrote: “We have yet to write the history of that other form of madness, by which men, in an act of sovereign reason, confine their neighbours, and communicate
Chapter 7: Subject as Object

individual was surrounded by a network of institutions and a network of experts that had as their goal the normalization of the individual. The carceral network that surrounded the individual resulted from the extension of the principles of the Panopticon into almost all areas of everyday life. The individual was to be observed at all times, which demanded the construction of systems of surveillance that would be ever vigilant in the effort to detect the pathological. And the carceral network was not simply an effort to detect the pathological, but also an effort to treat the pathological. The individual was to be continually observed by experts because he had to be taught to willingly submit to the normalizing judgment of experts and, in turn, to apply the normalizing judgment to himself and to others. It was in this way that individuals were mobilized to support the normalizing project. The individual was not only the object of the technologies of discipline and bio-power but also became the agent who animated these technologies. It was through the production of such an agent that the project of normalization could be reproduced. The technologies of discipline and bio-power produced individuals that had internalized the normalizing judgement and were therefore sensitive to the language of normalization and could stand vigilant against the appearance of the pathological. As Hobbes had mused, only when the eyes and ears of the subjects had become extensions of the eyes and ears of the sovereign would the Leviathan most closely approximate omnipotence. The technologies of discipline and bio-power realized this dream because once the individual had internalized the logic of the norm, the individual became a link in the network of surveillance.

and recognize each other through the merciless language of non-reason” (MC, p. ix). The suggestion here is that the techniques by which madness is objectified in the modern world—medicine and psychoanalysis—are, in their ferocity and effects, as mad as that which is their object. In fact, *Madness and Civilization* is structured around a metaphorical reversal: by its conclusion, Foucault is asking the question about whether the inmates are running the asylum. Foucault concludes *Madness and Civilisation* with the observation, “Ruse and new triumph of madness: the world that thought to measure and justify madness though psychology must justify itself before madness, since in its struggles and agonies it measures itself by the excess of works like those of Nietzsche, of Van Gogh, of Artaud. And nothing in itself, especially not what it can know of madness, assures the world that it is justified by such works of madness” (MC, p. 289).
Given the formation of the normalized individual, Foucault argued that it was impossible to draw any sharp distinction between power and knowledge. He argued that the formation of the normalized individual demonstrated that "power and knowledge directly imply one another" and that there can be "no power relation without the correlative constitution of a field of knowledge, nor any knowledge that does not presuppose and constitute at the same time power relations" (DP, p. 27). Accordingly, Foucault argued that to understand the complex relation between power and knowledge one must reject the claim that "power makes mad", as well as the claim that "the renunciation of power is one of the conditions of knowledge" (DP, p. 27). The project of normalization instead relies on a harmonious relation between power and knowledge. This relation began with the development of new sciences—medicine, psychology, anthropology—that all attempted to classify the normal and the pathological. This classification in turn served to guide the refinement of the technologies of power. Scientifically conceptualizing the pathological served to help refine power because this conceptualization not only helped identify which individuals were in need of punishment/correction but also helped perfect the techniques of punishment/correction. The project of normalization, in its attempt to produce a particular type of soul, implied the formation of a partnership of science and power. The human sciences provided an increasingly sophisticated account of the individual that was to be used to help normalize the individual.

THE JUDGEMENT OF THE NORM

In explaining how the project of normalization was able to turn individuals into its agents, Foucault claimed that, "Through its different practices—psychological, medical, punitive, educational—a certain ideal, a model of humanity had taken shape; and this idea of humanity has today become normalized, evident, and passes as universal" (DE4, p. 782). Individuals have been taught and shaped to see their own lives and the lives of others in terms of the normal and the pathological. Foucault understood the formation of this normalized and universal understanding of humanity in political terms. The formation of such an image of
humanity was, for Foucault, the answer to the question, “why do we obey?” Why is it that in the twentieth century people have been mobilized around the need to destroy the pathological and have thus contributed to the bloodshed and pain of this century? The logic of the norm is obeyed because individuals have been inscribed by a certain type of power and a certain type of knowledge. Individuals have, in their very materiality, been shaped so that they become self-policing with respect to the normal and the pathological. It is this internalization of the logic of the normal and the pathological that makes individuals willing to accept the enormous consequences of the project of normalization. The construction of the normalized individual transformed the individual from an object of power into a subject of power. The workings of the human sciences and the technologies of power ensured that the individual’s identity was linked to the interplay between the normal and the pathological. By constructing identity around the normal and the pathological, discipline and bio-power ensured that the individual who had been the object of the normalizing project would, in turn, objectify others in relation to the normal and the pathological; the individual thus became the living embodiment of the technologies of discipline and bio-power.

That the individual who was subjected to the power of the norm would become an agent of such power was not, according to Foucault, completely surprising. Foucault implied that individuals who were objects of a particular sort of power would often seek opportunities to apply this same power to others. In one of his most compelling texts, The Lives of Infamous Men, Foucault argued that a feature of absolute monarchy was that individuals, if they knew how to “play the game”, “could for themselves, toward their own ends and against others, make use of the enormity of absolute power” (DE3, p. 247). To justify this claim, Foucault analysed one type of absolute power within France—lettres de cachet—and discovered that many of the individuals imprisoned as a result of these lettres were imprisoned at the request of a spouse, family member, neighbour, or friend. Individuals, Foucault argued, used lettres de cachet in such a way that:
political sovereignty came to insert itself into the most elementary level of the social body; from subject to subject ... between members of the same family ... from interests, ... from rivalries, out of hatred and out of love, one was able, outside the traditional realms of authority and obedience, to make the most of the resources of a political power that had the form of absolutism; everyone ... could become for the other a terrible monarch without laws; *homo homine rex.* (DE3, p. 247)

Through the use of the *lettres de cachet,* the model of absolute sovereignty did not apply simply to the relation between subjects and their sovereign but also, at least in a certain respect, to the relations between subjects; subjects were able to treat others as they themselves were treated by power. The construction of the normalized individual produced a similar effect. For Foucault, the term "project of normalization" did not merely describe the relation between those with power (i.e., experts) and those without power (i.e., those declared pathological). The project of normalization also described social relations as a whole. Individuals became willing to use the power of the norm against others, and it was this mobilization of individuals that served to grant the normalizing project such a solid foundation and widespread effect.

Because the term "normalizing project" described social relations as a whole, Foucault argued it was not surprising that the terrible consequences of the logic of the norm were accepted. That individuals have been willing to accept and have been mobilized to carry out the death of the pathological demonstrates how individuals have been penetrated by the logic of the norm. Individuals who are continually the object of the power of discipline and bio-power make others into objects of the same power. Individuals who have been the objects of punishment/correction are willing to make others into the objects of punishment/correction. The acceptance of and participation in actions that range from the widespread use of pharma-psychology to the sterilization of those deemed "mentally unfit" and the pursuit of genocide, reflects the extent to which entire societies have come to orient
themselves around the logic of the normal and the pathological. When faced with this realization, Foucault concluded that the destruction of the project of normalization required more than attacks on its most obvious manifestations—the network of experts and institutions within which punishment/correction take place. The destruction of the project of normalization would also require a patient and labourious self-examination. For Foucault, the question became, can we find a way to “rid our discourse and our acts, our hearts and our pleasures of fascism? How to flush out the fascism which has incrusted our behaviour?” (DE3, p. 135). First and foremost, Foucault insisted that the destruction of the project of normalization required us to rid ourselves of the impulse to judge ourselves and others according to the continuum of the normal and the pathological.
CRITIQUE AND TRUTH

Foucault’s account of the technologies of power was the target of a particular criticism. It was argued by, for example, Jürgen Habermas and Charles Taylor, that Foucault’s presentation of the technologies of power was too one-sided. First, the argument goes, because Foucault saw power everywhere he rendered the term almost meaningless. Secondly, Foucault’s claim that discipline and bio-power were at the heart of modern politics was too extreme and did not reflect reality. Thirdly, and perhaps most importantly, Foucault refused to acknowledge any standard of truth that was independent of power and therefore could not justify why we should resist power. Both Habermas and Taylor insisted that Foucault’s abandonment of the notion of truth led to a contradiction at the heart of his philosophy. Habermas wrote that the “instructive contradiction” within Foucault’s philosophy can be seen “when he opposes his critique of power ... to the analytic of the true in such a way that the former is deprived of the normative standards it would have to derive from the latter”.

1 Taylor maintained that, “The Foucaultian notion of power not only requires for its sense the correlative notions of truth and liberation, but even the standard link between them, which makes truth the condition of liberation. To speak of power, and want to deny a place to ‘liberation’ and ‘truth’, as well as the link between them, is to speak incoherently”. 2 Foucault’s theory of power is incoherent, Taylor suggested, because though Foucault does not want to admit it, he implies that power “requires a victim. It cannot be a ‘victimless crime’, so to speak. ... Something must be being imposed on someone ... . [and] there must be an element of fraud, illusion, false pretenses involved in this. Otherwise it is not clear that the imposition is in any sense an exercise of


Foucault’s account of the technologies of power, then, amounts to a philosophy of victimization that, because it lacks a concept of truth, cannot respond to the problem of victimization. Foucault’s philosophy is incoherent or contradictory because in attempting to erect a critique of the technologies of power and the project of normalization, he did so without providing the foundation necessary to support such a critique.

Habermas’s and Taylor’s preoccupations with truth caused them to overlook how Foucault himself understood the nature of his critique. “[M]y project,” Foucault explained of *Discipline and Punish*, “is precisely to bring it about that they [those within the prison system] ‘no longer know what to do,’ so that the acts, gestures, discourses which up until then had seemed to go without saying become problematic, difficult, dangerous” (*FL*, p. 284). In articulating his critique of the technologies of power, Foucault wanted to employ the same criterion of truth as did Hobbes. “[W]hen I shall have set down my own reading orderly, and perspicuously,” Hobbes wrote, “the pains left to another, will be onely to consider, if he also find not the same in himself. For this kind of Doctrine, admitteth no other Demonstration” (*Lev*, Introduction, p. 83). Foucault’s analysis of the technologies of power was not an attempt to establish an independent criterion of truth by which to judge these technologies. Instead, Foucault wanted to describe the technologies of power such that those who found his description persuasive would also find themselves paralysed: knowing that their actions aided and abetted the project of normalization, individuals would no longer know what to do. The paralysis induced by ‘no longer knowing what to do’ was, for Foucault, the first moment in the overturning of the project of normalization. To no longer know what to do, to ask the question “What is to be done?”, was, Foucault suggested, the beginning of learning how to “think differently”. “There are times in life,” Foucault explained, “when the question of knowing if one can think differently than one thinks, and perceive differently than one sees, is absolutely necessary if one is to go on looking and reflecting at all” (*HS2*, p. 8). The absolute

---

3 *ibid.* p. 91.
necessity of thinking differently led Foucault to redefine the very task of philosophy. Foucault asked: “what is philosophy today—philosophical activity, I mean—if it is not the critical work that thought brings to bear on itself? In what does it consist, if not in the endeavour to know how and to what extent it might be possible to think differently, instead of legitimating what is already known?” (HS2, pp. 8-9). Foucault’s critique of the technologies of power did not rely on, nor did he believe it needed to rely on, anything resembling the truth; instead, his critique depended upon Foucault’s ability to convince his readers about the consequences of their everyday activity in the hope of inspiring the attempt to think differently.

Nevertheless, Foucault did feel somewhat uneasy about his account of the technologies of power and, in 1976, he said of his writings and lectures of the previous few years: “None of it does more than mark time. Repetitive and disconnected, it advances nowhere. Since indeed it never ceases to say the same thing, it perhaps says nothing. It is tangled up into an indecipherable, disorganized muddle” (PK, p. 78). Foucault explained: “all my work in recent years has been couched in the schema of struggle-repression, and it is this—which I have hitherto been attempting to apply—which I have now been forced to reconsider” (PK, p. 92). By using the “schema of struggle-repression”, Foucault seemed to validate Taylor’s claim that power was never a “victimless crime”. After all, within the institutions of the mental asylum and the prison, individuals were repressed or dominated by power; and Foucault wanted to encourage individuals to struggle against such domination. But Foucault had come to realize that such a presentation of power ignored one important dimension of the relationship between the individual and power: the individual was not simply the object of power but also the agent of power. Foucault had already partially recognized the individual as the agent of power, but only insofar as the individual helps reproduce relations of power; that is, the individual who has been the object of the technologies of power becomes an agent of normalization, judging both himself and others in relation to the norm. Foucault now wanted to move beyond this incomplete understanding of
agency to investigate exactly how the individual participates in the flow of power by working upon **himself**. In other words, Foucault came to believe that the formation of the "soul" was not simply the effect of the technologies of power but also the effect of the individual’s own labour. While power does indeed have its victims (individuals who are dominated) even individuals who have not been directly victimized by power shape themselves into agents of power. The movement away from what I referred to in the introduction as Foucault’s first project (the study of the technologies of power) to his second project (the study of the techniques of the self), was marked by a shift in focus. Foucault turned his attention from the victims of power to how and why those who have not been victimized by power become normalized subjects.

**CHANGING THE SUBJECT?**

The distinguishing feature of Foucault’s second project was that the analysis of subjectivity was not a peripheral but a central concern. When studying the technologies of power, Foucault only looked at subjectivity insofar as subjectivity was an effect of the technologies of power. When he began his second project, however, though he still maintained that subjectivity was an artifact of power, Foucault introduced a distinction that was absent in his first project—a distinction between the “self” and the “subject”. Foucault did not put forward a rigorous definition of either the self or the subject, but his comments about the distinction between the self and the subject appeared to lead him back to Hobbes. The self, Foucault implied, was the receptacle of “experience”. But though the self can, through memory, give experience a certain unity (i.e., it is all my experience) and rationality (i.e., specific experiences can be related to specific effects), the self cannot give experience coherence. Experience can only become coherent through a subject. Subjectivity makes experience coherent because subjectivity consists of judgements about the relative value of experiences; subjectivity, then, moves beyond granting experience unity and rationality toward articulating which experiences should be pursued and cultivated and why (see *E*, pp. 199-205). Foucault’s account of the relationship between the self and the subject has certain
commonalities with Hobbes’s understanding of the individual. The infant, Hobbes argued, experiences pleasure and pain but this experience is neither rational nor coherent. As memory expands, experience becomes rational because the individual can begin to make prudent decisions about which experiences will produce pleasure and which will produce pain; but, Hobbes argued, prudence is not a strictly human quality, nor can prudence alone render experience coherent. According to Hobbes, humans have a psychological need to understand the ultimate sources of “good and evil fortune”, and this need drives humans beyond prudence toward the construction of stories about the sources of “good and evil fortune”. These stories about the sources of good and evil function in much the same way as Foucault’s notion of subjectivity; stories about good and evil fortune allow the individual to interpret and evaluate experience (e.g., if God is the source of good and evil fortune, and if God prohibits infidelity, then infidelity is not a true pleasure). Though Foucault did not agree that the formation of subjectivity was a response to the psychological need to understand “good and evil fortune”, Foucault did agree that the formation of subjectivity was a necessary (and perhaps natural) consequence of the human self.

Foucault argued that the subject never exhausts the possibilities of the self; all forms of subjectivity only assimilate part of the totality of experience, and they do so by making specific choices about how these experiences should be understood. “Experience,” Foucault argued, “is the rationalization of a process ... which results in a subject, or rather in subjects. I would call subjectivation the process through which results the constitution of a subject, or more exactly, of a subjectivity which is obviously only one of the given possibilities of organizing a consciousness of self” (FL, p. 472). It is possible, then, to imagine very different ways of organizing subjectivity around the self, and the self can never be reduced to a particular form of subjectivity. For Foucault, the question therefore became: How can we explain the development of the normalized subject? Foucault believed that his analysis of the technologies of power provided part of the answer. The analysis of the technologies of power demonstrated that the normalized subject was partially constructed along the lines proposed
by Bentham: the normalized subject was the product of a power that manipulated the dynamics of life. However, Foucault claimed that this answer could not fully explain how and why everyday life had been penetrated by the norm. In attempting to articulate a more complex explanation, Foucault raised the example of sexuality: How and why have individuals become sexual subjects that understand the experience of sexuality in terms of the norm? To invoke the technologies of power to explain the formation of the sexual subject is unsatisfying. Certain individuals are formed as normalized sexual subjects in and through technologies of power, but this process cannot account for how the vast majority of individuals are formed as sexual subject. To explain the phenomenon of the normalized sexual subject in its entirety, Foucault insisted, one had to turn from the technologies of power to what he called the techniques of the self; one had to go from examining the way in which individuals are worked on by the technologies of power to the way in which individuals have worked on themselves.

There are two important differences between Foucault's analysis of the technologies of power and his analysis of the techniques of the self. First, there is the distinction between technologies and techniques. Technology, as Foucault used the term, is not limited to machines or institutions but describes any organized system of techniques used to achieve a specific goal. A complex machine, the Panopticon, and the science of psychology are thus all examples of technology. Techniques, on the other hand, are specific mechanics and methods (of motion—human or otherwise—and thought) used to achieve a specific goal. Techniques, then, are the constituent parts of technologies, but techniques do not necessarily have to be assembled into technologies, and certain techniques cannot be assembled into technologies (whether Foucault thought a technology of the self either possible or desirable remains an

---

4Foucault tended to see the individual in terms of different types of subjectivity. He wrote: "You do not have the same type of relationship to yourself when you constitute yourself as a political subject who goes to vote or speaks at a meeting and when you are seeking to fulfil your desires in a sexual relationship. Undoubtedly there are relationships and interferences between these different forms of the subject; but we are not dealing with the same type of subject" (E, p. 290).
open question\(^5\). Secondly, there is a dramatic difference between the historical scope of Foucault’s investigation of the technologies of power and his investigation of the techniques of the self. The technologies of power, Foucault argued, were born and developed in the “modern age” (1800-present). To understand these technologies of power, then, one had to investigate the transition from the “classical age” (1600-1800) to the “modern age”. During his investigation of the techniques of the self, however, Foucault looked far beyond the classical and modern ages; he insisted that the roots of the techniques of the self that are used by individuals in the formation of the normalized subject were to be found in antiquity. Foucault’s turn toward an investigation of the subject, then, can be clearly distinguished from his investigation of the technologies of power by: (i) a marked change of attention from organized technologies used to objectify individual to the piecemeal techniques by which individuals shape themselves; and by (ii) a dramatic extension of the historical scope of his philosophic project. But while the distinctions between Foucault’s two projects are apparent, the connection between the two is not. Foucault never provided a detailed account of the exact relation between his description of the technologies of power (which I have outlined in the previous two chapters) and the techniques of the self. In the following chapter I will outline Foucault’s understanding of the techniques of the self and then, in my conclusion, I.\(^5\)

\(^5\)In 1982, Foucault gave a seminar entitled “Technologies of the Self”. This is the only instance in which Foucault spoke of a “technology of the self”. The seminar took place at the University of Vermont, and was conducted in English. It appears that the French editors of *Dits et écrits* believed that Foucault’s statements about the “technology of the self” resulted from his unfamiliarity with English. The title of the French translation is “Les techniques de soi” and the translation consistently employs “techniques” in the place of “technology”. That this inconsistency in translation was a deliberate choice by the editors of *Dits et écrits* can be seen in the French translation of a second seminar Foucault conducted (also in English) during the same visit to the University of Vermont. This second seminar, entitled “The Political Technology of Individuals” detailed the emergence of surveillance and the total control of everyday life in the formation of a political technology employed to normalize individuals. In the French translation of this second article the phrase “political technology” is consistently rendered as “technologie politique”. There is some basis for the editors’ decision to engage in such selective translation: Foucault tended to use the term dispositif to signify his understanding of the organization of technologies of power, and he never hinted that the idea of a dispositif could be used to explain the work individuals carry out on themselves. For an analysis of Foucault’s notion of dispositif, see Gilles Deleuze, “*What is a dispositif?”* in *Michel Foucault. Philosopher*. trans. & ed. Timothy J. Armstrong.*
investigate whether it is possible to reconcile what Foucault said about the technologies of power and what he said about the techniques of the self.
In the second volume of the *History of Sexuality*, Foucault announced he was beginning the study of subjectivity. Foucault wrote that according to his initial plan for the *History of Sexuality* he had wanted to study sexuality from three distinct but interrelated “axes”: “(1) the formation of sciences (savoirs) that refer to it, (2) the systems of power that regulate its practice, (3) the forms within which individuals are able, are obliged, to recognize themselves as subjects of this sexuality” (*HS2*, p. 4). Foucault claimed that while, “the work I had undertaken previously” (*HS2*, p. 4) had provided him with the tools needed to examine the first two axes, he found himself somewhat unprepared to engage in a study of subjectivity: “It appeared that I now had to undertake a third shift, in order to analyse what is termed ‘the subject.’ It seemed appropriate to look for the forms and modalities of the relation to self by which the individual constitutes and recognizes himself *qua* subject” (*HS2*, p. 6). Leading up to this point, Foucault had almost exclusively approached the question of subjectivity from the standpoint of the production of subjectivity by the technologies of discipline and biopower. Foucault now wanted to make subjectivity an object of analysis in its own right: What, exactly, are the dynamics of the subject produced by the technologies of power? How does the normalized subject recognize himself? Foucault thus moved from exploring the way in which the individual is produced as a subject in and through scientific knowledge and the technologies of power to analysing the contours of this subjectivity.

In a certain respect, Foucault began turning back towards Hobbes at this point. A large part of Hobbes’s political project consisted of attempting to highlight the inner dynamics of the peaceful subject. If power was to produce peace, Hobbes insisted, individuals had to be encouraged to understand their own passions and their own goals in a very specific way. Hobbes encouraged the development of this understanding through, for
example, his thought-experiment of the state of nature. His description of the no-win situation of the state of nature would, Hobbes hoped, encourage individuals to understand the destructive effects of human desire and to act to remedy these effects. Foucault, coming to recognize the importance of this dimension of Hobbes's political philosophy, began to investigate exactly how individuals were encouraged to form themselves into subjects who fit into the logic of power. Although they both stressed the importance of subjectivity, Hobbes and Foucault understood the foundations of subjectivity quite differently. Hobbes argued that the subjectivity of the peaceful subject was not natural but was instead the product of human artifice. However, Hobbes also argued that even if the peaceful subject is the product of human artifice, it is not created out of nothing. For Hobbes, while the peaceful subject was not natural (i.e., it is a "second birth"), it was based on what we had been given by nature; the peaceful subject is not a transcendence but a reconceptualization of the natural subject. Foucault, on the other hand, rejected this idea of "the given". "Nothing in man—not even his body", Foucault exclaimed, "is sufficiently stable to serve as the basis for self-recognition or for understanding" (NGH, pp. 87-88). Foucault continued:

We believe ... that the body obeys the exclusive laws of physiology and that it escapes the influence of history, but this ... is false. The body is molded by a great many distinct regimes; it is broken down by the rhythms of work, rest, and holidays; it is poisoned by food or values, through eating habits or moral laws (NGH, p. 87).

In opposition to Hobbes, Foucault argued that human subjectivity does not rest on any solid foundation. Neither life, nor the body, offers any dynamics permanent enough to justify a belief in either a universal or an authentic form of subjectivity. The subject, Foucault insisted, was, in its very essence, an artifact produced in and through knowledge and power.

As an artifact of knowledge and power, the subject was not, according to Foucault, the manifestation of some more or less intelligible essence. Instead, the subject had a history—a history that could only be understood in terms of the subject's "genealogy". Foucault approached his own analysis of the subject in this way: rather than attempting to understand the modern subject in relation to a notion of authenticity, Foucault investigated
the way in which the modern subject was formed. Foucault concluded, somewhat reluctantly, that the roots of the modern subject were to be found in the ancient world, and that to understand the modern subject one needed to examine the, "slow formation, in antiquity, of a hermeneutics of the self" (HS2, p. 6). Foucault argued that this hermeneutics of the self revolved around what he called the "techniques of the self", or, "those intentional and voluntary actions by which men not only set themselves rules of conduct, but also seek to transform themselves, to change themselves in their singular being, and to make their life into an oeuvre that carries certain aesthetic values and meets certain stylistic criteria" (HS2, pp. 10-11). These techniques of the self were at the heart of subjectivity, Foucault claimed, because they were the means by which individuals turned themselves into moral subjects.

Foucault understood morality in terms of "the real behaviour of individuals in relation to the rules and values that are recommended to them" (HS2, p. 25). Foucault wanted to study the formation of the modern moral subject who followed the rules and the values of the norm because he had internalized these rules and values. To show that this subject was the product of a history was, Foucault hoped, to show that this subject had not always existed and could thus be replaced by something new.

THE GENEALOGY OF THE MODERN SUBJECT

In looking at the formation of the subject, Foucault had turned his attention to understanding exactly why individuals engage in ethical behaviour. Foucault claimed that whereas his investigation of the human sciences and the technologies of power had provided an analysis of how, in the present, "others" are governed (insofar as they are objects of power), the study of the self-formation of the subject would highlight how and why individuals govern themselves. Foucault linked the government of the self to ethics, insofar as the government of the self is what "determines how an individual is supposed to constitute himself as a moral subject of his own actions" (S, p. 263). To establish these parameters, the individual was
taught certain techniques of the self to shape four broad areas of the individual’s inner life.\(^1\)

First, there was the “determination of the ethical substance”, which identified which part of the individual (e.g., the soul, the mind, the desires) must be worked upon to attain the moral ideal. Secondly, there was the “mode of subjection”, or the articulation of why the individual should engage in certain behaviours (e.g., because the law commands, because of the need to master one’s desires). Thirdly, there was the “ethical work”, which consisted of the actual procedures used by an individual to shape himself as a moral being (e.g., prayer, meditation, rational introspection). Lastly, there was the “telos of the ethical subject”, which represented the ultimate goal of moral behaviour (e.g., salvation, inner harmony) \((HS2, pp. 26-28)\). The techniques of the self were applied to these four areas of an individual’s inner life to enable the individual to evolve into a particular type of subject—one who would not only follow a certain moral code but who would also have a certain type of personal relation to this moral code. This formation of a moral subject, Foucault wrote:

> is not simply “self-awareness” but self-formation as an “ethical subject,” a process in which the individual delimits that part of himself that will form the object of his moral practice, defines his position relative to the precept he will follow, and decided on a certain mode of being that will serve as his moral goal. And this requires him to act upon himself, to monitor, test, improve, and transform himself: ... Moral action is indissociable from these forms of self-activity, and they do not differ any less from one morality to another than do the systems of values, rules, and interdictions. \((HS2, p. 28)\)

It was by using the categorization of the processes of self-formation to render intelligible the modern ethical subject that Foucault hoped to discover why the modern individual has

\(^1\)At this point it is important to note that Foucault did not believe that the individual could invent techniques of the self. “I would say that if I am now interested in how the subject constitutes itself in an active fashion through practices of the self, these practices are nevertheless not something invented by the individual himself. They are models that he finds in his culture and that are proposed, suggested, imposed on him by his culture, his society and his social group” \((FL, pp. 440-441)\). That the techniques of the self are a social rather than individual product is important if Foucault’s notion of “self-creation” is to be understood. For Foucault, the individual never creates himself out of nothing. Instead, the process of self-creation is always limited and determined by the models of the self that exist prior to the individual.
become an individual whose ethical constitution leads him to monitor and test his own behaviour in relation to the norm and, if necessary, correct his behaviour.

It was in the *History of Sexuality* that Foucault used this understanding of the techniques of the self to trace the genealogy of the modern subject. Foucault wanted to trace the evolution and mutation of the techniques of the self from their original Greek formulation to their use in the modern project of normalization. In his sketches of this genealogy, Foucault identified four broad historical periods—Greek, Roman, Christian, modern—which were all unique in (i) their articulation of the techniques of the self, and (ii) their description of the type of subject that was to be formed through these techniques. But though he differentiated these four historical periods, he also grouped together Greece and Rome on the one hand, and Christianity and modernity on the other. Foucault’s rationale for these groupings was his claim that within the Greek and Roman periods, the techniques of the self were used in the development of very individualized displays of morality, while in Christianity and modernity, these techniques were used to overcome individuality through the construction of a universal subject. Foucault’s understanding of how and why this transformation occurred, however, remained incomplete. While his account of the Greek and Roman techniques of the self were published in the second and third volumes of *The History of Sexuality*, because of his death, his account of the techniques of the self within Christianity (*Les aveux de la chair*) remains unpublished, and his account of the techniques of the self in the modern age was never written. Foucault’s genealogy of the modern subject was halted mid-stream and therefore can only be pieced together from a variety of sources, such as interviews and lectures. What follows is a very brief attempt to outline, at a most general level, Foucault’s account of the genealogy of the modern self.

In the ancient Greek and Roman worlds, Foucault claimed, the techniques of the self were built around the maxim, *epimeleisthai heautou*—“to take care of oneself”, or, “the care of oneself”. This care of the self identified desire as the moral substance and involved the development of techniques that could be used by the individual to arrive at a state of self-
mastery over desire. This self-mastery was not to be accomplished though the formation of a universal subject; Foucault even argued that "Classical antiquity never problematised the constitution of the self as subject" (FL, p. 472). Self-mastery was instead understood as a very personal struggle with desire, and the ethical work of the care of the self was likewise very personal. In classical antiquity, "everything was a matter of adjustment, circumstance, and personal position" such that, through the art of existence, the ethical practice of the individual manifested itself as "an attitude and a quest that individualized his action, modulated it, and perhaps even gave him a special brilliance by virtue of the rational and deliberate structure his action manifested" (HS2, p. 62). Models of moral excellence were indeed put forward, but they were models that were to be turned to for inspiration rather than imitation. For example, Foucault argued that, in relation to pleasure the goal of ancient ethics "was much less to establish a systematic code that would determine the canonical form of sexual acts, trace out the boundary of the prohibitions, and assign practices to one side or the other of a dividing line, than to work out the conditions and modalities of a 'use'; that is, to define a style for what the Greeks called chr sis aphrodisi n, the use of pleasure" (HS2, p. 53). By attempting to work out the use of pleasure rather than linking pleasure to a rigorous moral code, the ancient care of the self was concerned with the development of forms of self-relation and techniques that would allow the individual to shape his own behaviour in accordance with the experience of pleasure. In his description of the ancient care of the self, what most interested Foucault were the notions of self-relation and self-formation. The care of the self presented ethical activity as labour on oneself rather than as obedience to an articulated code. From the standpoint of the care of the self, moral codes were, according to Foucault, of secondary importance. It is not that such codes were non-existent, but "their exact observance may be relatively unimportant, at least compared with what is required of the individual in the relationship he has with himself" (HS2, p. 30).

Foucault devoted much time to the elaboration of the various techniques employed within the care of the self. "It is important to understand," explained Foucault, "that this
application to oneself did not require simply a general attitude, an unfocused attention. The term *epimeleia* [care] designates not just a preoccupation but a whole series of occupations... *Epimeleia* implies a labor" (HS3, p. 50). The elaboration of this labour involved (i) developing and refining practices that would enable the individual to engage in self-mastery, (ii) determining the amount of time that should be devoted to these practices, and (iii) establishing informal and institutional contexts within which these practices could be taught and learned. Foucault considered this last element—teaching and learning—to be of particular importance for the ancient care of the self: "The care of the self ... implies a relationship with the other insofar as proper care of the self requires listening to the lessons of a master. One needs a guide, a counsellor, a friend, someone who will be truthful with you. Thus, the problems of relationships with others is present throughout the development of the care of the self’ (E, p. 287). Because it required teaching and learning, the care of the self, though a very individual pursuit, required the presence of others—a presence that was to be found in and though dialogue, institutionalized forms of education, and the writing of letters (HS3, pp. 50-54). Thus, though the ancient care of the self emphasized the development of an individual's relationship with himself, it was also the basis of a rather complex relation between self and other. The ancient care of the self, Foucault believed, encouraged the creation of a particular type of community—a community made up of individuals engaged in an extremely personal pursuit of self-mastery but who could only attain such mastery in and though the proper relation with others.

Christianity, Foucault claimed, marked a dramatic change in the understanding of the ancient techniques of the self and the ancient practice of the care of the self. Within Christianity, the techniques of the self were no longer linked, as was the ancient care of the self, to an extremely individual pursuit, but rather to the formation of a universal subject. The Christian techniques of the self attempted to form a universal subject by bringing the individual into a relation with a divine law; the care of the self became "a mode of subjection in the form of obedience to a general law that is at the same time the will of a personal god"
The Christian techniques of the self, however, did follow the ancient care of the self in urging the individual to look inwards, to examine his thoughts and desires. But the Christian techniques of the self were not simply an exercise in self-mastery, but also, through the procedures of confession and penitence, an exercise that taught the individual to judge himself and submit to the judgement of others about whether or not his thoughts and desires corresponded to the divine law. It was the procedure of judgement that, for Foucault, constituted the decisive feature of the Christian techniques of the self. This procedure of judgment amounted to a “duty to explore who he is, what is happening within himself, the faults he may have committed, the temptations to which he is exposed. Moreover, everyone is obliged to tell these things to other people, and thus to bear witness against himself” (E, p. 178). In bearing witness against himself the individual’s goal was, through penitence, conformity to the divine law through purification, and this purification amounted to self-renunciation. The subject who accords fully with the divine law is a subject stripped of all individuality. In contrast to the nature of the care of the self in classical antiquity, the telos of the Christian techniques of the self was not the consolidation of the individual though self-mastery but the obliteration of individuality in and though conformity to the divine law.

It was the Christian practice of forcing the individual to bear witness against himself that Foucault connected to the modern project of normalization. The techniques of the self employed by the project of normalization encourage the individual to seek out any hint of pathology within himself and, if found, to confess its existence; in modern techniques of the self, the continuum of the normal and the pathological is the functional equivalent of Christianity’s divine law. Within modernity, however, the act of bearing witness against

---

2In comparing antiquity and Christianity, Foucault wrote: “The monk’s task was not the philosopher’s task: to acquire mastership over oneself by the definitive victory of the will. It was perpetually to control one’s thoughts, examining them to see if they were pure ... Real purity is not acquired when one can lie down with a young and beautiful boy, as Socrates did with Alcibiades. A monk was really chaste when no impure image occurred in his mind, even during the night, even during dreams” (E, p. 183).
oneself was not linked, as in Christianity, to the obliteration of the self; the modern techniques of the self were “inserted into a different context by the so-called human sciences in order to use them without renunciation of the self but to constitute, positively, a new self” \((E, \text{p. 249})\). Within modernity, judgment and confession are the ethical work by which the individual is taught to accept the scientific elaboration of the norm; and the telos of this work is not the purification of the individual in and though conformity to the divine law but the positive constitution of a new individual—an individual who has been normalized and who is self-policing in the pursuit of the project of normalization.

ETHICS AND AUTONOMY

While Foucault began his genealogy of the modern subject to understand its historical formation, he came to believe that this genealogy had another important dimension: it served to highlight a path not taken. Foucault increasingly became convinced that the ancient care of the self was not simply the genealogical origin of the modern subject; the ancient care of the self represented a type of subjectivity antithetical to the project of normalization. According to Foucault, the ancient care of the self was unique because it was morally binding even though the work and discipline it demanded were not imposed by anything like technologies of power or the norm. As Foucault argued:

In antiquity, this work on the self with its attendant austerity is not imposed on the individual by means of a civil law or religious obligation, but is a choice about existence made by the individual. People decide for themselves whether or not to care for themselves. I don’t think it is to attain eternal life after death, because they were not particularly concerned with that. Rather, they acted so as to give to their life certain values (reproduce certain examples, leave behind them an exalted reputation, give the maximum possible brilliance to their lives). It was a question of making one’s life into an object for a sort of knowledge, for a technē—for an art. \((E, \text{p. 271})\)

The care of the self was compelling not because it depended on technologies of power or a norm but because it depended on the cultivation of a certain aesthetic sensibility—one’s life was material to be formed, shaped, and transformed. “The idea of the bios as a material for an aesthetic piece of art,” Foucault commented, “is something that fascinates me. The idea also that ethics can be a very strong structure of existence, without any relation with the juridical
per se, with an authoritarian system, with a disciplinary structure" (E, p. 260). The care of the self, Foucault argued, by turning an individual’s life into an artistic project represented the possibility of a “strong structure of existence” that could preserve individual autonomy at the heart of ethical activity. For Foucault this preservation of individual autonomy was completely at odds with the logic of normalization. The individual would no longer be engaged in a process of self-formation centred on the construction of a universal, normalized form of subjectivity; the individual would instead be engaged in an attempt to shape his own life according to a highly singular understanding of beauty.

Moreover, Foucault believed that as well as preserving individual autonomy at the heart of ethical behaviour, the ancient care of the self also embodied an ethical imperative that was completely at odds with the project of normalization. Focussing mainly on ancient Greek texts, Foucault argued that freedom was the fundamental “ethical problem” to which the ancient care of the self responded (E, p. 286). The Greeks, Foucault claimed, understood freedom in terms of “nonslavery”—an understanding that had two different dimensions. In its obviously political dimension, nonslavery meant that a free individual could not be the slave of another. In this respect, the care of the self implied the need to struggle against being dominated by others—a struggle that could take a wide variety of forms ranging from armed resistance to Socratic integrity. But the idea of nonslavery had another dimension that though less obviously so, was also entirely political. As well as not being the slave of another, the idea of nonslavery also included “not being a slave to oneself and one’s appetites, which means with respect to oneself one establishes a certain relationship of domination, of mastery, which was called arch__, or power, command” (E, pp. 286-287). Within Greek literature, this dimension of nonslavery was entirely political because the tyrant was presented as the archetypal failure of self-mastery. It was argued that the tyrannical individual who desires to dominate others—the individual who attempts to, through the “abuse of power ... imposes one’s fantasies, appetites, and desires on others”—does so because he is “the slave of his appetites” (E, p. 288). From the perspective of nonslavery, then, the desire to
Part 3: Foucault

dominate others grows out of a failure to take proper care of oneself; the desire to dominate others is linked to the inability to master one’s own desires. Foucault argued that the idea of nonslavery enabled the Greeks to situate freedom within clearly defined bounds; freedom was located in between the condition of being dominated by others—slavery—and the condition of dominating others—tyranny—and the ancient care of the self amounted to the work an individual did upon himself in the attempt to remain within these boundaries. The quality of an individual’s labour upon himself could be seen in and through his relations with others; an individual who truly cared for himself would neither allow himself to be placed in a condition of slavery nor would he want to turn others into slaves. Foucault believed that for these reasons the ancient care of the self was built around an ethical imperative that amounted to an absolute rejection of domination—both the domination of oneself and the domination of others—and Foucault saw in this ethical imperative a logic completely antithetical to the project of normalization.

At the same time as Foucault praised the Greek understanding of the care of the self, he also thoroughly criticized Greek political and social institutions. In attempting to hold out the care of the self as an ethical way of life that was antithetical to the project of normalization, Foucault did not want to return to antiquity; in fact he considered such a desire to be misdirected.³ “You see,” Foucault explained, “what I want to do is not the history of solutions—and that’s the reason why I don’t accept the word alternative. I would like to do the genealogy of problems, of problématiques” (E, p. 256). In this spirit, Foucault’s presentation of the ancient care of the self was not intended to serve as a model of ethical life

³In part, Foucault argued that within classical antiquity, ethical concerns were built around a fundamental dissymmetry. Foucault claimed that the Greek “ethic of pleasure” centred upon the male and, in this sense, “is linked to a virile society, to dissymmetry, exclusion of the other, an obsession with penetration, and a kind of threat of being dispossessed of your own energy, and so on. All of that is quite disgusting!” (E, p. 258). Foucault claimed that his own attempt to renew the care of the self was related to the question: “Are we able to have an ethics of acts and their pleasures which would be able to take into account the pleasure of the other? Is the pleasure of the other something that can be integrated in our pleasure, without reference to either law, to marriage, to I don’t know what?” (E, p. 258).
but as a means of highlighting the problematic that surrounded the modern procedures of self-formation. His comments about the care of self in antiquity were simply the beginning of Foucault's attempt to understand the modern procedures of self-formation and his attempt to find ways to subvert this procedure of self-formation. What Foucault took from the ancient care of the self was the manner in which the care of the self responded to the problematic of freedom, and Foucault used this response to forge a modern version of the care of the self—one inspired by, but not wedded to, antiquity. In forging this modern version of the care of the self, Foucault noted that, in a strange way, something like the care of the self had been articulated by modern thinkers, and he argued that this modern articulation of the care of the self offered a more realistic means of resisting normalization than did the ancient care of the self. Foucault thus turned to highlighting and developing the modern articulation of the care of the self to show how it could provide an insight into exactly how the project of normalization has shaped the modern problematic of freedom.

It was in the essay *What is Enlightenment?* that Foucault offered his most systematic exploration of what would be required in a modern version of the care of the self. In this essay, Foucault argued that modernity should not be understood as a historical epoch but instead as an *ethos*. The characteristic of the modern ethos, according to Foucault, was the

---

4This distinction has, I believe, caused great difficulty in interpreting exactly what Foucault was doing in his analysis of classical antiquity. Pierre Hadot, in a short but interesting article, offers an insight into and critique of Foucault's interpretation of the ancient care of the self. Hadot argues that Foucault ignored an important dimension of the ancient care of the self. The ancient care of the self, Hadot explains, was not simply a means of attaining a "conversion toward and possession of the self" (Pierre Hadot, "Reflections on the Idea of the 'Cultivation of the Self' in Philosophy as a Way of Life." p. 206), but also a means of "becoming aware of oneself as a part of nature, and a portion of universal reason" (ibid., p. 211). But, Hadot continues, there was nothing really illegitimate about Foucault's selective interpretation of the care of the self. Hadot writes of Foucault, "his description of the practices of the self—like, moreover, my description of spiritual exercises—is not merely a historical study, but rather a tacit attempt to offer contemporary mankind a model of life, which Foucault calls 'an aesthetics of existence.'" (ibid., p. 208). Hadot concludes that for this reason, his own disagreements with Foucault did not really concern the historical practice of the care of the self in antiquity, but were instead, "in the last analysis [differences] of philosophical choice" (ibid., p. 206). Unlike Foucault, Hadot wanted to preserve the experience of cosmic order and universal reason as the heart of ethics, and thus believed that "M. Foucault is propounding a culture of the self which is too aesthetic" (ibid., p. 211).
way in which the present was approached by the individual. In outlining the characteristically modern attitude towards the present, Foucault examined two very different figures—Kant and Baudelaire. Foucault identified Kant’s own text *What is Enlightenment?* as the point of origin of the modern practice of philosophy. Foucault argued that Kant wanted to understand how the present shaped and conditioned the practice of philosophy by uncovering exactly how his own philosophy grew out of and answered the deepest needs of the present. Kant’s essay amounted to “a reflection by Kant on the contemporary status of his own enterprise” (*E*, p. 309)—a reflection that, Foucault contended, committed philosophy to a critical attitude toward the present. In its most radical form, this critical attitude consisted of making the question, “who am I, and where have I come from” the central philosophic question. Kant committed philosophy and the philosopher to “reflection on history and a particular analysis of the specific moment at which he is writing and because of which he is writing” (*E*, p. 309).

Alongside Kant, Foucault invoked Baudelaire as the “almost-indispensable example” (*E*, p. 309) of the modern attitude toward the present. In Baudelaire’s hands, the present gained a certain self-sufficiency. The present was not a moment embedded within a larger process, but a moment that came from a contingent past and that pointed toward an unknown future. The task was to relate oneself to the present moment such that one respects the present in its integrity but does not “maintain or perpetuate it” (*E*, p. 310). Instead, one shows respect for the present moment in the effort to discover and exploit its poetry by shaping one’s own life and one’s own world such that they heighten this poetry. “Baudelairean modernity,” Foucault explained, “is an exercise in which extreme attention to what is real is confronted with a practice of a liberty that simultaneously respects this reality and violates it” (*E*, p. 311). In other words, one cannot flee the present; one must take from the present all that it offers and use this offering as the material for the poeticization of one’s life. It is this element of Baudelaire that Foucault most admired: “Modern man, for Baudelaire, is not the man who goes off to discover himself, his secrets and his hidden truth; he is the man who tries to invent himself” (*E*, p. 312).
For Foucault the philosophic posture adopted by Kant and the artistic imperative of Baudelaire, in spite of their differences, must be made to coexist. The philosophic attitude inaugurated by Kant can, if informed by Baudelaire's artistic imperative, become a means of critique that uses philosophy to discover the intricate structures of the present and thereby prepare the ground for the practice of freedom. Kant's historical ontology, however, must be replaced by Baudelaire's understanding of the present, and, in this respect, philosophy should abandon all efforts to root out the universal. Critical philosophy should no longer be, as it was with Kant, "the search for formal structures with universal value"; instead it should become, when informed by Baudelaire's image of the present, the investigation of "the events that have led us to constitute ourselves and to recognize ourselves as subjects of what we are doing, thinking, saying" (E, p. 315). Such a critical philosophy is centred on freedom rather than metaphysics. It would seek to highlight the "contingency that has made us what we are" (E, p. 315) and attempt to use this to "give new impetus, as far and wide as possible, to the undefined work of freedom" (E, p. 316). If this hybrid could be successfully accomplished, Foucault believed it would bring about a new understanding of the task of philosophy and the use of freedom:

The critical ontology of ourselves must be considered not, certainly, as a theory, a doctrine, nor even as a permanent body of knowledge that is accumulating; it has to be conceived as an attitude, an ethos, a philosophic life in which the critique of what we are is at one and the same time the historical analysis of the limits that are imposed on us and an experiment with the possibility of going beyond them. (E, p. 319)

In bringing together Kant and Baudelaire, Foucault thus attempted to transform the practice of philosophy; philosophy is not simply a science, it is a way of life.  

---

5When turning to philosophy, Foucault was clear that, in itself, it cannot supply the grounds needed to make the practice of freedom ethical. Foucault argued: "there is a very tenuous 'analytic' link between a philosophic conception and the concrete political attitude of someone who is appealing to it; the 'best theories' do not constitute a very effective protection against disastrous political choices; certain themes such as 'humanism' can be used to any end whatsoever .... The key to the personal poetic attitude of a philosopher is not to be sought in his ideas, as if it could be deduced from them, but rather in his philosophy-as-life, in his philosophic life, his ethos" (FR, p. 374).
the painstaking use of reason was necessary if freedom was to be possible in the present. Only through the painstaking use of reason could one successfully conceptualize the intricacies of power in the present; and Foucault suggested that this conceptualization was the only means of becoming free from the hidden hand of power. But conceptual liberation, though necessary, is not alone sufficient to give rise to the elaboration of freedom. Here, Baudelaire is needed. The willingness to turn one’s own life into a work of art must be combined with the analytic quality of philosophic critique; this combination alone can spark the grand gesture of pushing beyond the boundaries discovered in and through philosophic critique. The present calls for a form of philosophy that holds out self-experimentation as its task; and this experimentation must aim toward the construction of new modes of self-formation that will allow the individual to be freed from the domination of the logic of the project of normalization.

REDEFINING POWER AND FREEDOM

In his second project—the investigation of the techniques of the self—Foucault used the term “freedom” with great frequency. In a sense, freedom had played a role in Foucault’s first project—the attempt to outline the technologies of power—but it lurked in the background reminding us that power can never be “absolutely absolute”. Freedom served to raise questions about obedience—Why, if power cannot preclude the possibility of change, do we obey?—and as a call to transgression. However, freedom began to take on a greater resolution for Foucault with his discovery of the care of the self. Foucault no longer linked freedom to the either/or of obedience/transgression but began to investigate freedom’s

---

6In an much earlier interview, Foucault explained the necessity of philosophy, by noting its absence in the initial elaboration of “dandyism”. Foucault argued: “It takes the rather naïve optimism of the nineteenth century ‘dandies’ to imagine that the bourgeoisie is stupid. On the contrary, one has to reckon with its strokes of genius ... . The power of the bourgeoisie is self-amplifying, in a mode not of conservation but of successive transformations. Hence the fact that its form isn’t given in a definitive historical figure as is that of feudalism. Hence both its precariousness and its supple inventiveness” (PK, p. 160). Critical philosophy is needed to come to terms with the supple inventiveness of power in the modern world.
necessary conditions. Foucault now linked freedom to the modes of self-relation whereby I make myself an ethical being. “Freedom,” Foucault argued, “is the ontological condition of ethics. But ethics is the considered form that freedom takes when it is informed by reflection” (E, p. 284). Freedom, then, is united with ethics. Ethical activity—the work one does on oneself in the formation of subjectivity—is possible because we are free, and ethical activity is necessary if our freedom is to be fully actualized. We must work on ourselves and we must reflect upon ourselves; only this work and reflection can allow us to avoid the reach of the normal and thereby engage in autonomous self-creation. We are surrounded by technologies that turn us into objects to be normalized, and we are animated by techniques of the self that support the process of normalization. The work of ethical activity, the work of the care of the self, must be undertaken if we are to become capable of shaping our lives in acts of artistic creation rather than having our lives shaped around a universalized norm. The connection between ethical activity and freedom means that freedom cannot be reduced to transgression.\(^7\)

To strike out blindly against social rules or even social norms does not guarantee that one has escaped the logic of the project of normalization. To escape the logic of the norm and become capable of using freedom to construct one’s own life requires a painstaking and sustained attempt to root out the processes of normalization that take place both around and inside the individual. Foucault’s initial call to transgression was thus replaced by a call to critical philosophy that was, as Foucault put it, a task that “requires work on our limits, that is, a patient labor giving form to our impatience for liberty” (E, 319).

The connection between freedom and ethics caused Foucault to refine his understanding of power. In light of the possibility of a considered and reflective freedom, power can no longer be viewed simply as a force acting upon the individual to produce a “soul”. Power instead denotes a certain type of relationship, and “what defines a relationship

---

\(^7\)As an interesting aside, while the index of the first two volumes (1954-1975) of Dits et écrites contains 27 references to “transgression”, including reference to an essay entitled “Préface à la transgression”, the index of the latter two volumes (1976-1984) includes only 4 references to transgression.
of power is that it is a mode of action which does not act directly and immediately on others. Instead it acts upon their actions: an action upon an action” (SP, p. 220). In this refined definition of power, Foucault wanted first of all to differentiate power and force. It is force, not power, that acts directly and immediately on the individual, and force is not an example of power but of domination. “It seems to me,” Foucault explained, “that we must distinguish between power relations understood as strategic games between liberties—in which some try to control the conduct of others, who in turn try to avoid allowing their conduct to be controlled or try to control the conduct of others—and the states of domination that people ordinarily call ‘power’” (E, p. 299). States of domination exist when force and violence are employed in the effort to extinguish freedom—when, for example, individuals are imprisoned or when the body is shaped in accordance with the norm. With this understanding of domination Foucault accepted Hobbes’s definition of freedom as the absence of external impediments. But for Foucault, the absence of external impediments was only one side of the definition of freedom. Freedom also included the ability to engage in the artistic creation of oneself, and Foucault’s redefinition of power reflected this new dimension of freedom. In opposition to domination, “Power is exercised only over free subjects, and only insofar as they are free” (SP, p. 221). Power, then, is not incompatible with freedom; power neither implies the imposition of force, nor the attempt to preclude artistic self-creation. In fact, Foucault now argued that power was freedom’s necessary counterpart:

I do not think that a society can exist without power relations, if by that one means the strategies by which individuals try to direct and control the conduct of others. The problem, then, is not to try to dissolve them in the utopia of completely transparent communications but to acquire the rules of law, the management techniques, and also the morality, the thes, the practice of the self, that will allow us to play these games of power with as little domination as possible. (E, p. 298)

It is not power but the domination of the norm that constitutes the modern predicament; it is not power but domination that must be theorized in and through critical philosophy; and it is not power but domination that must be resisted. The political task facing us, Foucault now suggested, was the use of the care of the self to subvert the domination of the technologies of
power and the project of normalization by constructing relations of power that facilitated freedom.

In his understanding of exactly how this political task of subverting the domination of the norm was to be accomplished, Foucault can perhaps be described as an unpersuaded liberal. At the same time as Foucault conducted his investigation of subjectivity and the care of the self he also, in his 1979 and 1980 lectures at the Collège de France, turned toward an investigation of liberalism. In the course summary of the 1979 lectures, Foucault wrote: "I tried to analyse 'liberalism' not as a theory or an ideology ... but rather, as a practice, which is to say, as a 'way of doing things' oriented toward objectives and regulating itself by means of sustained reflection" (E, pp. 73-74). The practice of liberalism, Foucault argued, "resonates with the principle: 'One always governs too much'—or, at any rate, one always must suspect that one governs too much" (E, p. 74). This liberal principle implied that the regulative principle of government could not be utility or economy. "The suspicion that one always risks governing too much," Foucault explained, "is inhabited by the question: Why, in fact, must one govern?" (E, pp. 74-75). The liberal analysis of governing, then, did not presuppose the existence or necessity of the state, but instead sought “to determine why there has to be a government, to what extent it can be done without, and in which cases it is needless or harmful for it to intervene" (E, p. 75). Liberalism, Foucault concluded, was not "a utopia

8Foucault opposed this liberal principle to the, "'reason of state' which, since the end of the nineteenth century, had sought, in the existence and strengthening of the state, the end capable of both justifying a growing governmentality and of regulating its development. The Polizeiwissenschaft developed by the Germans in the eighteenth century ... always subscribed to the principle: One is not paying enough attention, too many things escape one’s control, too many areas lack regulation and supervision, there’s not enough order and administration. In short, one is governing too little. Polizeiwissenschaft is the form taken by a governmental technology dominated by the principle of the reason of state, and it is in a ‘completely natural way,’ as it were, that it attends to the problems of population, which ought to be the largest and most active possible—for the strength of the state. Health, birthrate, sanitation [i.e., the principles of bio-power] find an important place in it, therefore, without any problem" (E, p. 74). This opposition is significant because while the government based on Polizeiwissenschaft is a natural fit with the conditions needed for the deployment of discipline and bio-power, the practice of liberalism is not. In fact, the principle of liberalism allows for the possibility of a radical critique of the technologies of discipline and bio-power, which is why Foucault found himself attracted to the practice of liberalism.
never realized” but “a tool for criticizing the reality: (1) of a previous governmentality that
one tries to shed; (2) or a current governmentality that one attempts to reform and rationalize
by stripping it down; (3) of a governmentality that one opposes and whose abuses one tries to
limit” (E, p. 75). The practice of liberalism is the practice of permanent critique because it is
the practice of continually asking government to justify its actions and even its existence.9 As
a practice of permanent critique, liberalism provides an image of governing that can, at least
in principle, be used to question the penetration of the technologies of power and the project
of normalization into every aspect of everyday life.

Given Foucault's description of the practice of liberalism as permanent critique, why
call Foucault an unpersuaded liberal? Though Foucault was intrigued by the liberal notion
that one is always governing too much, Foucault did not have faith in liberalism’s preferred
tools for protecting the individual from the government of the norm: (i) responsible
government and (ii) rights.10 Foucault did see the need for responsible government. “Well,”
Foucault explained, “the important question here, it seems to me, is not whether a culture
without restraints is possible or even desirable but whether the system of constraints in which

9 In a 1981 interview Foucault said: “I don’t believe that one can oppose critique and
transformation—‘ideal’ critique and ‘real’ transformation. ... There is not a time for critique and a
time for transformation; there are not those who engage in critique and those who engage in
transformation, those who are closed off in an inaccessible radicalism and those who are obliged to
make necessary concessions to the real. In fact, I believe that the work of profound transformation
can only be done in an atmosphere that is free and always agitated by permanent critique” (DE4, pp.
180-181).

10 Richard Rorty put forward a slightly different hypothesis. Foucault, Rorty implied, was somewhat
ashamed to be a liberal. Rorty argued this was the case because Foucault collapsed his “moral
identity” (how he should relate to others) and his “ethical identity” (his attempt to engage in self-
creation). Rorty suggested that while there was nothing incompatible with a liberal moral identity
(i.e., I should treat others fairly) and a Romantic ethical identity centred on self-creation (i.e., I must
engage in the artistic creation of myself), Foucault could not reconcile the two. He thus succumbed to
a “quasi-anarchism” because of a “misguided attempt to envisage society as free of its historical past
as the Romantic intellectual hopes to be free of her private past” (Richard Rorty, “Moral Identity and
Private Autonomy” in Philosophical Papers, Volume 2. p. 196). But even if Foucault refused to
declare his allegiance to liberalism he was, Rorty contended, “a useful citizen of a democratic
country—one who did his best to make that country’s institutions fairer and more decent. I wish that
he had been more comfortable with that self-description than he was” (ibid. p. 198).
a society functions leaves individuals the liberty to transform the system” (E, p. 148). All social restraints, Foucault noted, will be deemed intolerable by certain individuals but “a system of constraint becomes truly intolerable when the individuals who are affected by it don’t have the means of modifying it” (E, p. 148). Responsible government is needed, then, if social relations are to be structured around power rather than domination; social restraints are only domination when individuals do not have the ability to alter these restraints. But responsible government, even if it can provide protection against domination, cannot eliminate the logic of the norm; as long as individuals remain self-policing with respect to the norm, responsible government will be nothing more than another way of furthering the project of normalization.11 As long as subjectivity is constructed according to the logic of the norm, even if individuals have access to institutions that allow them to shape political policy, they will not do away with but, further entrench, the technologies of normalization. In this respect, the attempt to root out the norm though the practice of the care of the self and artistic self-creation is needed before the institutions of responsible government can be used to promote freedom in its complete sense.

Foucault also thought that rights, much like responsible government, could not sufficiently protect the individual from the logic of the norm. Foucault saw the need for rights

---

11Foucault’s attitude toward responsible government echoed that of J.S. Mill (which, in part, was directed against Bentham). Responsible government, Mill explained, was seen as the most effective way of protecting individuals from tyranny by linking government to the will of the people. Mill argued that though it was claimed that responsible government is controlled by “the people”, it is really controlled by “the most active part of the people; the majority, or those who succeed in making themselves accepted as the majority” (J.S. Mill. On Liberty and other writings. p. 8). And, Mill explained, the majority can use the machinery of responsible government to institute a “social tyranny more formidable that many kinds of political oppression” (ibid. p. 8). Mill, in a passage that could have been written by Foucault, claimed that the tyranny of the majority, “leaves fewer means of escape [than does a political tyranny], penetrating much more deeply into the details of life, and enslaving the soul itself. Protection, therefore, against the tyranny of the magistrate is not enough: there needs protection also against the tyranny of prevailing opinion and feeling; against the tendency of society to impose, by other means than civil penalties, its own ideas and practices as rules of conduct on those who dissent from them; to fetter the development, and, if possible, prevent the formation, of any individuality not in harmony with its own ways, and compel all characters to fashion themselves upon the model of its own” (ibid. p. 8).
but claimed that “rules are never rigorous enough” and “universal principles are not strict enough” to limit the scope of power. Power, Foucault concluded, must always be opposed by “impassible [infranchissable] laws and rights without restriction” (DE3, p. 794). Foucault only provided a brief glimpse of what he meant by “rights without restriction”. “The adversity [malheur] of humanity ... grounds an absolute right to rise up and make demands of those who hold power” (DE4, p. 708). This right, Foucault insisted, was the right of “international citizenship to rise up against all abuses of power, whomever be their author, whomever be their victims” (DE4, p. 707). But rights, no matter their necessity and use in highlighting and fighting against abuses of power, cannot, in and of themselves, counter the extra-judicial dimension of the project of normalization or spark the creation of new ways of life antithetical to the project of normalization. For example, when speaking about the fight for gay rights, Foucault explained that this fight cannot be “the final stage” because: (i) “There can be discrimination against homosexuals even if such discriminations are prohibited by law”; and (ii) “It’s not only a matter of integrating this strange little practice of making love with someone of the same sex into preexisting cultures; it’s a matter of creating cultural forms” (E, p. 157).

In the final instance, Foucault believe that the application of rights was

---

12 In this claim Foucault invokes a Hobbesian understanding of natural right. The rights of individuals must be inviolable such that no political expediency or “right of state” can be invoked to remove these rights.

13 This comment comes in a short statement entitled, “Face aux gouvernements, les droits de l’homme”. In this statement, Foucault argued that non-governmental organizations such as Amnesty International and Médecins du monde have “created a new right: that of private individuals to intervene in the order of politics and international strategies” (DE4, p. 708). Perhaps the loose coalition of a variety of non-governmental organizations and individuals that came together to protest against the Multilateral Agreement on Investments and Tariffs and the World Trade Organization would have been seen by Foucault as an example of this new right in action.

14 Foucault argued that, “Human rights regarding sexuality are important and are still not respected in many places. We shouldn’t consider that such problems are solved now. It’s quite true that there was a real liberation process in the early seventies. This process was very good, both in terms of the situation and in terms of opinions, but the situation has not definitely stabilized. Still, I think we have to go a step further. I think that one of the factors of this stabilization will be the creation of new forms of life, relationships, friendships in society, art, culture, and so on through our sexual, ethical, and political choices. We must not only defend ourselves but also affirm ourselves, and affirm ourselves not only as an identity, but also as a creative force” (E, p. 164; DE4, p. 736).
too vulnerable to social judgements, and that rights were too closely tied to the institutional forms used to entrench the project of normalization. Rights, then, though they may be used to struggle against political domination, cannot be used as the basis for the development of new ways of life that subvert the domination of the norm. "[I]f what we want to do is to create a new way of life," Foucault argued, "then the question of individual rights is not pertinent. In effect, we live in a legal, social, and institutional world where the only relations possible are extremely few, extremely simplified, and extremely poor" (E, p. 158). If individuals are to make possible new types of social relations free from the project of normalization, individuals must move beyond rights toward experimentation aimed at changing the very conception of how we can and should relate to ourselves and to others.

Foucault, then, was an unpersuaded liberal because though he thought the principle of liberalism (i.e., that one always governs too much) generated the possibility of a permanent and radical critique of government, he did not believe that the tools of liberalism could be used to overcome the logic of normalization. To accomplish the destruction of the norm, Foucault instead turned to a provisional anarchism; anarchistic self-creation was to be used to subvert the process of normalization but once this subversion had been accomplished new social and political institutions were to be built. Individuals, then, must become anarchistic. Individuals must move beyond the construction of identity by existing political and social institutions that all, to some degree, embody the logic of the norm, and attempt to use the care of the self to engage in the creation of their own identities and the creation of new types of

15In this respect I believe Foucault’s anarchism plays the same functional role as does Marx’s and Engels’s socialism or Nietzsche’s “free spirit”: it is a strategic tool used to pave the way for the appearance of a new social order. The “new” social order Foucault had in mind, however, might not be as radical as those proposed by Marx/Engels or Nietzsche. Once the technologies of power and the techniques of the self that support the project of normalization have been dismantled, I think Foucault would have been quite content with a society built around the liberal principle that one always governs too much. For Foucault, then, an anarchistic project of self-creation may have been the necessary condition for a practice of liberalism robust enough to protect freedom.
relationships with others. The attempt to engage in self-creation must be anarchic insofar as the individual cannot rely on any authority in the creation of herself, but must instead develop singular, even unique standards that can be used in the care of the self. But for Foucault, even if the individual does not rely on any authority in the development of new standards for self-creation, the act of self-creation always involves relationships with others; experimentation on oneself is not a solitary pursuit but can only be realized in and though others. Foucault turned to sexuality and, in particular, the attempt to "create a gay life" as an example of what he had in mind. Sexual experimentation, Foucault argued, could lead to the "creation of new possibilities of pleasure, which people had no idea about previously" (E, p. 165). Foucault pointed to S&M as such an instance. "The practice of S&M is the creation of pleasure," Foucault insisted, "and there is an identity with that creation. And that's why S&M is really a subculture. It's a process of invention" (E, pp. 169-170).

---

16 Foucault criticized the modern welfare state along these lines. While the welfare state promises to protect the autonomy of the individual by ensuring that all individuals have the basic material necessities of life, the welfare state actually serves to entrench the project of normalization. The welfare state protects normalization, Foucault argued, because it is built around a distinction between a population that can and should be "insured" and a population that can and should be "exposed". "Our systems of social coverage," Foucault explained, "impose a specific way of life around which they form individuals as subject [assujettit les individus], and each person or group that for one reason or another do not want to, or cannot achieve this way of life find themselves marginalized" (DE4, p. 372). The protections offered by the welfare state are means of encouraging individuals and groups on the edges of society to accommodate themselves to the standards of the norm.

17 In the first volume of the History of Sexuality Foucault suggested that pleasure was one way of undermining the normalized subject. The self's experience of pleasure, Foucault suggested, could be used to highlight the very limited scope of a subjectivity built around the logic of the norm. Foucault wrote: "we need to consider the possibility that one day, perhaps, in a different economy of bodies and pleasures, people will no longer quite understand how the ruses of sexuality, and the power that sustains its organization, were able to subject us to that austere monarchy of sex, so that we became dedicated to the endless task of forcing its secret, of extracting the truest of confessions from a shadow" (HS1, p. 159)

18 Foucault also argued that S&M represented a new type of power relation: "What strikes me in regard to S&M is how it differs from social power. What characterizes power is the fact that it is a strategic relation which has been stabilized through institutions. So the mobility in power relations is limited, and there are strongholds that are very, very difficult to suppress because they have been institutionalized and are now very pervasive in courts, codes, and so on. All this means that the strategic relations of people are made rigid. On this point, the S&M game is very interesting because it is a strategic relation, but it is always fluid. Of course, there are roles, but everybody knows very
pleasures and, more generally, the anarchic invention of new identities and relationships between self and other was the way the project of normalization was to be overcome. But what would happen if and when normalization had been overcome remained unclear. If anarchistic self-creation was to pave the way for a new social and political order, Foucault was not able (or not willing) to provide any hint about the social and political forms that would appear in the wake of the project of normalization. How could the new identities that were to be created be institutionalized? "The question of what kinds of institutions we need to create is an important and crucial issue," Foucault admitted, "but one that I cannot give an answer to. I think that we have to try to build a solution" (E, p. 172).

... or, even when the roles are stabilized, you know very well that it is always a game. Either the rules are transgressed, or there is an agreement, either explicit or tacit, that makes them aware of certain boundaries" (E, p. 169).
Conclusion

ESCAPING THE NORM

The modern world is, as Foucault described it, structured around a project of normalization. Individuals are categorized according to a continuum of the normal and the pathological. Then, depending upon how they are categorized, individuals are worked on and manipulated by power—a power used to turn individuals into normalized subject or, in the extreme case, to eliminate those who resist normalization. The normal and the pathological have thus become the fundamental political categories. The normalization of individuals is accomplished, Foucault argued, in two ways. First, there are the technologies of power. These technologies turn individuals into objects to be transformed by a power that has “become material”. Secondly, there are the techniques of the self. These techniques are the ways in which individuals turn themselves into subjects who look inward and seek out any traces of pathology—traces that, if found, are to be confessed and, hopefully, eliminated. The modern subject is the subject who, in Nietzsche’s words, “goes voluntarily into a madhouse”.¹ It was through the development and implementation of the technologies of power and the techniques of the self that the project of normalization has come to absorb the individual within its logic and thereby constitute the fabric of everyday life.

Foucault’s description of the two main features of the modern world—the technologies of power and the techniques of the self—implied that the modern world is a strange amalgam of heterogeneous elements. Foucault’s writings are structured around two different historical frameworks. On the one hand, his writings that treat the emergence of discipline and bio-power deal with the movement from the “classical age” (1600-1800) to the “modern age” (1800-present). This transition, Foucault argued, marked both the birth of the technologies of discipline and bio-power as well as the project of normalization. From the

¹Friedrich Nietzsche. *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. Zarathustra’s Prologue, 5, p. 16.
standpoint of the technologies of power, then, the modern world is quite young, having existed for little more that two centuries. On the other hand, when Foucault turned to the techniques of the self whereby the individual engages in self-formation, Foucault moved well past the eighteenth century into antiquity. The techniques by which the individual forms himself into a normalized subject have their roots in the ancient care of the self. The particular dynamics of the modern world and its project of normalization, then, are the result of a meeting between technologies of power that first appeared in the eighteenth century and techniques of the self whose roots are to be found in the ancient world. It was, Foucault suggested, in the heterogeneity of these elements that the weakness of the project of normalization was to be found. The project of normalization relies on techniques of the self that incubate a form of self-relation—the ancient care of the self—that is at odds with the logic of normalization. In his genealogy of the modern subject, Foucault argued that the ancient care of the self is a genetic component of the modern subject—a genetic component that could, with work, become an effective means of resisting the norm. However, because of his death, Foucault’s genealogy of the modern subject remained incomplete. Although he produced rather lengthy analyses of the ancient care of the self, he offered neither a complete description of the modern normalized subject, nor a detailed analysis of the exact relation between the technologies of power and the techniques of the self. These gaps, I believe, leave Foucault’s identification of the care of the self as a means of resisting the norm at loose ends. A deeper account of how the care of the self can become an effective means of resistance is necessary. As well, a more sustained proof that the techniques of the self are as important to the extension of the norm as are the modern technologies of power must be articulated. I want to explore this latter problem because I believe that until it is solved, Foucault’s claims on behalf of the care of the self are undercut by his own analysis of the modern world, in particular, his arguments about how the technologies of power have come to attach themselves to life.
THE FRACTURED PRESENT?

The primary difficulty with Foucault's notion of the care of the self is his claim that the care of the self can be used to resist normalization, which ultimately rests upon an unproven assumption. To see the care of the self as capable of subverting the project of normalization is to assume that in the extension of the norm, the techniques of the self are as, if not more, important than the technologies of power. The efficacy of the care of the self depends on the claim that the power I exercise over myself is of equal or greater importance than the power exercised over me by technologies. If this assumption is true, then it is clear that the care of the self—or something quite similar—by subverting the power I exercise over myself, can be seen as an effective way to resist the norm. But what if this assumption is misguided? What if the technologies of power are more important than the techniques of the self in the extension of the norm? What if the technologies of power can extend the norm even without the support of the techniques of the self? If Foucault's assumption about the relative weight of the technologies of power and the techniques of the self is incorrect, his assessment of the radical possibilities of the care of the self would, at the very least, have to be reevaluated, and, at most, even abandoned.

The limits of Foucault's analysis of the modern world have been reached once his assumption about the relative weight of the technologies of power and the techniques of the self has become the subject of questions and doubts. Foucault's own work does not provide any satisfying grounds to settle this question. Because Foucault's genealogy of the modern subject is incomplete, it does not address the exact relation between the technologies of power and the techniques of the self—a relation that, if Foucault's assumption is to be defended, must be clearly defined. But if Foucault's work cannot settle this issue, it does highlight the necessity of a detailed examination of the relation between the technologies of power and the techniques of the self. Foucault's own analysis of the technologies of power, particularly two of his claims—namely, (i) that these technologies make possible the objectification of the individual, and (ii) that these technologies have allowed power to
“become material”—challenge Foucault’s assumption about the relation between the technologies of power and the techniques of the self. When pushed, these two claims allow one to imagine technologies of power that in and of themselves approximate, if not fully reproduce, the effects of the techniques of the self. Indeed, in their most radical form these two claims allow for the possibility of technologies of power that, in their ability to objectify the individual and in their use of a material power, promise the eclipse of the techniques of the self.

THE NORMALIZED SELF?

Foucault, when describing the way in which the technologies of power objectify the individual, turned to Bentham’s Panopticon. The Panopticon, Foucault argued, was ingenious in its institutionalization of the “inspection principle”. “In the Panopticon,” Foucault commented, “everyone is watched, according to his position within the system, by all or by certain of the others. Here we have an apparatus of total and mobile distrust, since there is no absolute point. A certain sum of malevolence was required for the perfection of surveillance” (FL, p. 235). What Foucault refers to as malevolence is not simply the assumption of total distrust (i.e., the guards are, like the prisoners, continually observed), but more precisely the Panopticon’s lack of an “absolute point”. In the Panopticon the observing gaze is not localized in a specific individual, nor does it flow along clearly defined channels of authority. Observation is everywhere—it is totalized—but also nowhere—it is not localized. Prior to this technical achievement of totalized observation, the individual was only objectified in and though specific relations (i.e., doctor/patient, police/suspect), and it was possible for the individual to find places of refuge; power was thus a loose web through which the individual could slip. The importance of the techniques of the self—the importance of the self-policing subject—was related to the looseness of the web of power. The individual must be self-policing if, even when outside the purview of the authoritative and objectifying gaze, he was to continue acting in accordance with the norm. This is closely related to one of Hobbes’s central claims: because power cannot be omnipotent, the individual must be somehow
persuaded to authorize the creation of a sovereign. The Panopticon, however, by creating a
totalized gaze that is everywhere and nowhere, filled the holes in the web of power; the
individual cannot find any refuge from the objectifying gaze. The actualization of this
totalized gaze meant that, even if not rendered irrelevant, the techniques of the self and self-
policing would certainly be rendered less important; because individuals were policed by a
totalized gaze, it was not necessary to force the individual to internalize the observing gaze.
Bentham himself, as I outlined, believed that the formation of a self-policing subject was
necessary, but only because he thought the universalization of the Panopticon was neither
necessary nor desirable. However, Foucault claimed that, in spite of Bentham, the inspection
principle was indeed slowly universalized (i) by technological advances (one need only think
about the omnipresence of video surveillance and computer databases) and (ii) by the fact
that the formation of a normalized subject causes each and every individual to direct a
normalizing gaze at each and every other individual. The individual, then, has become a
permanent object of surveillance and observation through an even more malevolent and
ingenious institutionalization of the “inspection principle” than had been imagined by
Bentham. If this is the case, then the technologies of power seem to hold out the possibility of
doing away with the necessity of anything like Hobbes’s persuasion, Bentham’s self-
government, or Foucault’s techniques of the self in the reproduction of the relations of power.
The individual need not be self-policing because the individual is always being policed by
others.²

²Deleuze distinguished “disciplinary societies” and “societies of control”. Disciplinary societies
depend on “enclosure”, that is, clearly defined spaces in which disciplinary technologies work on the
individual. Societies of control, on the other hand, do not depend on enclosures but on the formation
of “systems of variable geometry” that are “like a self-deforming cast that will continuously change
from one moment to the other”. Deleuze argued that we are in the process of moving from a
disciplinary society to a society of control, and that this movement has dramatically changed the
relation between the individual and power. Deleuze wrote: “The disciplinary societies have two
poles: the signature that designates the individual, and the number or administrative numeration that
indicates his or her position within a mass. This is because the disciplines never saw any
incompatibility between these two, and because at the same time power individualizes and masses
together, that is, constitutes those over whom it exercises power into a body and molds the
individuality of each member of that body. ... In the societies of control, on the other hand, what is
While the totalization of the objectifying gaze might make the techniques of the self less important, the materiality of power might actually make these techniques irrelevant. As Foucault put it, power became material when it no longer had to “be relayed by the representations of subjects” (FL, p. 209). What does a power that functions without being represented by the subject mean for the subject? One possibility is pursued by Anthony Burgess in his novel A Clockwork Orange. In this novel the “humble narrator” undergoes a program of normalization in which his body is trained to become ill to the point of immobilization when he thinks of committing, or witnesses, acts of violence. He is told: “What is happening to you now is what should happen to any normal organism contemplating the actions of the forces of evil, the workings of the principle of destruction. You are being made sane, you are being made healthy”. The narrator is made “sane” not by any psychological treatment aimed at transforming his identity. Indeed, his identity remains the same both before and after treatment. Instead, the “reclamation treatment” that the narrator undergoes uses the materiality of the narrator’s body to make his identity irrelevant: even if he wills violence, his body cannot respond; it is his body, not his identity, that has been normalized. Can A Clockwork Orange be seen as the ideal description of a power that has become material, just as Foucault understood Bentham’s Panopticon, not as a “dream building”, but as the ideal description of the objectification of the individual? Foucault did important is no longer either a signature or a number, but a code ... . The numerical language of control is made of codes that mark access to information, or reject it. We no longer find ourselves dealing with the mass/individual pair. Individuals have become ‘dividuals,’ and masses, samples, data, markets, or ‘banks’” (Gilles Deleuze, “Postscript on the Societies of Control” in Negotiations. trans. Martin Joughin. Columbia University Press: New York, 1995). Deleuze claimed that Foucault recognized that “control” rather than discipline was our “immediate future”, but if Foucault did come to such a recognition he did not speculate about how the institutionalization of control and the creation of the “dividual” would affect his notion of the care of the self.


4After the treatment the narrator’s body actually subverts the narrator’s identity. The effects of the treatment are described as follows: “Our subject is, you see, impelled toward the good by, paradoxically, being impelled towards evil. The intention to act violently is accompanied by strong feelings of physical distress. To counter these the subject has to switch to a diametrically opposed attitude. Any questions?” (Anthony Burgess. A Clockwork Orange. p. 128).
not really pursue the implications of the materiality of power, but there are indications—such as the replacement of the "talking cure" by pharma-psychotherapy—that such a power is being extended into everyday life. If in its ideal form such a power can raise even the possibility of making identity irrelevant, then a re-examination of Foucault's account of techniques of the self is necessary. If identity can be bypassed and subverted by technologies that have made power material, then to see the techniques of the self as a means of resistance seems to be, at the very least, a fading if not futile hope. Indeed, such a possibility would eclipse Bentham's claims about his new power of "mind over mind". The power over life would no longer be limited to the bombardment of the senses in the effort to produce ideas, but would instead be capable of bypassing the realm of ideas altogether because it is capable of manipulating the very materiality of life itself.

The possibility that the modern technologies of power can (i) make the individual a permanent object of power, and (ii) control the individual in spite of identity, reveals a dimension of the problematic of resistance that was unexplored by Foucault. Understanding whether and how the individual can resist technologies of power that are objectifying and material cannot be accomplished though a genealogy of the modern subject alone. A complete genealogy of the modern subject is certainly needed to flesh out the exact connection between the technologies of power and the techniques of the self. But the conclusion of this genealogy might not be, as Foucault himself suggested, showing how to subvert the norm though the care of the self; it might instead be the detailing of the eclipse of the modern subject by the technologies of power. This second possibility necessitates moving beyond a genealogy of the modern subject into something which Foucault actively resisted—a philosophical investigation of the individual.\(^5\) Is there anything in the individual that can

---

\(^5\)For example, Gad Horowitz has argued: "Foucault's antiessentialism leads him to reject prematurely, as unacceptably essentialist, all notion of a significant transhistorical, depth-psychoanalytical, erotic dimension of human experience, and to ignore the possibility of making, like Marcuse, a fundamental distinction between forms of power that construct subjectivity (Marcuse's 'basic repression') and those that construct dominated subjectivity ('surplus repression'). Against this background, the radicalism of Foucault's call for a new subjectivity appears so ambiguous and
resist an objectifying and material power? What is the exact role of identity in the reproduction of power? How do the “individual”, the “self”, and the “subject”—terms employed by Foucault without much precision—come together in and through identity? Has a technology of the subject or, even more important, a technology of the self become possible? Finally, what is the relation between the materiality and the identity of the individual? Until and unless such questions are addressed, Foucault’s presentation of the care of the self as a form of resistance to the project of normalization cannot be seen as anything more than an abstract proposal. There is, then, as Habermas and Taylor suggested but did not correctly identify, a contradiction at the heart of Foucault’s philosophy. This contradiction concerns Foucault’s idea of resisting power. Indeed, Foucault’s contradiction concerns the very status of the individual. On the one hand, Foucault outlined how the individual is turned into a subject through the workings of the technologies of power; on the other hand, Foucault argued that the individual could employ techniques of the self to reform subjectivity. Foucault, however, never really explored how deeply power has been able to penetrate the individual. Can something like a self remain after the technologies of power have enveloped the individual? Are Foucault’s accounts of the technologies of power and the techniques of the self compatible? That these two accounts could find themselves in contradiction is not so much a difficulty with Foucault’s philosophy as a reflection of the philosophical problem that confronts us: has the relationship between power and life developed to the point that we can

indeterminate that it can easily be dispensed with by his less-radical admirers and colonizers” (Gad Horowitz, “The Foucaultian Impasse: No Sex, No Self, No Revolution” in Political Theory. Volume 15, Number 1, February 1987. p. 61). In particular, Horowitz suggested that Foucault’s failure to distinguish between basic and surplus repression raises the question: “If power and resistance are always everywhere, how could we realistically hope for any change more radical than the alteration of the balance between them? Foucault would have great difficulty dealing with this question, and this difficulty is the opening for his colonizers” (ibid. p. 65). Foucault can be colonized because he cannot provide any explanation of why we should attempt to create a wholly new form of subjectivity as opposed to pursuing the reformation of the modern technologies of power and techniques of the self. Foucault’s inattention to the actual constitution of the self renders Foucault incapable of replying to those who use his work to claim that “modern values and norms are to undergo not transvaluation but revision and reform” (ibid. p. 65).
no longer determine with any certainty what life is, and where lies the boundary between the natural dynamics of life and what life has become through the actions of power?

AFTER FOUCAULT

At the moment, Foucault scholars are focused on Foucault’s idea of the care of the self and have all but abandoned his analysis of the technologies of power. But as long as the full implications of Foucault’s understandings of discipline and bio-power remain undeveloped, the care of the self, as attractive as it might be, cannot be anything more than an unpersuasive response to the project of normalization. In his analysis of the technologies of power and the project of normalization, Foucault highlighted one of modernity’s central, but unexplored dynamics—the relentless absorption of life into the political realm. Foucault’s genealogical method—through which he attempted to reveal the contingencies that formed the modern world—demonstrated how Hobbes could give birth to something whose legitimacy Hobbes would have questioned. By making life the centre of his own political project, Hobbes began the grand narrative that, at the moment, has positioned the individual within the context of the normal and the pathological. Foucault’s contribution to the analysis of modernity was his analysis of the complex relation between the scientific knowledge about life and the technological innovations that turned life into an object to be manipulated by power. It was, Foucault insisted, this strange combination that was at the heart of (i) the transformation of the goal of politics from the protection of the body politic to the protection of the population and (ii) the development of a new relation between power and the individual. The new technologies of discipline and bio-power, and the elaboration of the logic of the normal and the pathological, granted power both the right and the capacity to regulate the individual in order to cultivate the health of the population.

It was Foucault’s focus on the individual and the infinitesimal mechanisms of power that allowed him to bring into view the effects of power in the modern world. Hobbes and Bentham had both approached power in its abstract form. They were both concerned with discovering the roots of power in the hope of placing power on a more solid foundation; and
both assumed that discovering the roots of power would allow them not only to understand but control the effects of power. Foucault, by turning to an investigation of the “how” of power, demonstrated that there were unintended consequences to Hobbes’s and Bentham’s linking of power and life. To link power and life, Foucault argued, was to establish the foundation upon which, little by little, life was expanded into a continuum of the normal and the pathological. The appearance of the normal and the pathological extended the scope of power beyond what was imagined (and permitted) by either Hobbes or Bentham. The logic of the normal and the pathological, once entrenched, transformed the meaning of Hobbes’s and Bentham’s attempts to place limits on power. “Self-preservation” and “the greatest happiness of the greatest number” were no longer devices that provided an objective standard by which the authority and legitimacy of power could be judged. Instead both were absorbed into the logic of the norm, and linked to the existence and the health of the normal population; and the definition of the normal population is always a political rather than philosophical definition. This is perhaps one of Foucault’s most significant but underdeveloped ideas. Bentham believed it possible to use science to arrive at a definition of the normal and the pathological—a definition that could be used to determine whether or not an individual had to become the object of unremittent inspection. But according to Foucault, Bentham’s account amounted to a reversal of the true relationship between the definition of the normal and the pathological and the technologies of power. Foucault insisted that surveillance and observation precede rather than follow the definition of the normal and the pathological. We do not place individuals under surveillance because they are pathological; rather, we observe individuals so we can determine exactly what constitutes the normal and the pathological. That the technologies of power are used to determine the normal and the pathological is what constitutes the most significant political and philosophic challenge facing us today. Because, if the technologies of power themselves determine the norm, what limits, if any, can be erected to provide a stable standard that can be used to distinguish between a government’s capacity and a government’s right to employ the technologies of power on and against life?
It’s not like we’re building something out of living body parts. ... Well, OK, actually it is. It is a little Frankensteiny, I admit. But we’re not trying to create a new life form that’s going to go out and do evil. We just want to create a living computer.

Bill Ditto, Georgia Tech researcher in “neurosilicone computing”

Conclusion

A BRIEF HISTORY OF LIFE

Hobbes believed life could serve as a solid foundation for political theory, and he was the first to offer a systematic attempt to make life the centre of politics. Hobbes claimed that human physiology determined human behaviour; and his insistence that physiology determined behaviour had a profound effect on the shape of modern political philosophy. If human behaviour was determined by physiology, it followed that to govern human behaviour power had to either (i) be tailored to the physiological dynamics of human motion or (ii) become capable of manipulating these dynamics. Hobbes thought the former alternative correct. Life was a “given”, unalterable by the human will or power. Because the dynamics of life could not be altered, Hobbes constructed his best possible commonwealth around the dynamics of life. Individuals must come to understand that the consequence of the physiological pursuit of desire is a fear of others, a fear that culminates in the war of all against all in the state of nature. Individuals must then use this understanding to turn themselves into subjects who are persuaded that only an absolute sovereign is capable of
harnessing human motion to the pursuit of peace. In turn, to control human motion, the sovereign must also understand the physiological dynamics that underlie human behaviour. The sovereign must know when and how to reinforce the subjects’ understanding of the consequences of desire, and when and how to use the sword to keep the subjects in line. Hobbes argued that individuals had an almost instinctive understanding of the fact that life was the centre of politics: when threatened with violent death all humans of sound mind would agree that self-preservation is the fundamental human goal. This agreement, Hobbes suggested, could serve as the first step toward the construction of a peaceful commonwealth; agreement about the value of life was the impetus that would cause individuals to enter into the social covenant needed to authorize an absolute sovereign. In fact, because all individuals were focused on self-preservation, Hobbes argued that self-preservation had to be understood as the natural right of the individual. The individual only enters the social covenant to entrench his right to self-preservation, and the individual’s promise to obey the terms of the social covenant is no longer binding if and when his self-preservation is threatened. For Hobbes, then, life was the alpha and omega of the peaceful commonwealth: the physiological dynamics of life determined the shape of the body politic that would be capable of producing peace, and the preservation of the individual’s life was the sovereign’s most basic goal. Hobbes thus constructed a framework that united life and power in a particular way. The dynamics of life necessitated the creation of an absolute sovereign, but the rights of life ensured that the individual’s obligation to obey the sovereign vanished the moment the individual’s self-preservation was threatened.

Hobbes’s description of the political consequences of the relationship between life and power were very quickly abandoned. On the one hand, whereas Hobbes had argued that the right to self-preservation was the natural right of all individuals (i.e., the guilty as well as the innocent), after Hobbes the right to self-preservation was turned into a conditional right. Locke, for example, argued criminals were like violent predators who, by declaring war on humanity as a whole, had forfeited their right to life. Individuals and government could,
Locke argued, kill such predators with impunity. The protection of life was still seen to be the first order of governments, but governments were now understood to be protecting human ways of life (i.e., ways of life that were abiding by reason and the natural law) from inhuman ways of life (i.e., ways of life that were based on violence and transgression of the natural law). Locke's distinction between human and inhuman ways of life allowed him to re-establish a sovereign right Hobbes had taken away—the uncontested right to inflict death. On the other hand, Bentham (following the materialists of the French Enlightenment) turned toward physiology to move beyond Hobbes's understanding of the relation between life and power. Whereas Hobbes had argued that the physiological dynamics of life were something "given", Bentham suggested that understanding life and its dynamics made it possible to manipulate life; to understand the human machine, Bentham implied, was to gain the knowledge of how to dis- and reassemble this machine. Bentham's contribution to the development of the relation between life and politics was Bentham's new technology, the Panopticon, which he claimed would make possible the manipulation of life. Bentham's Panopticon, like Hobbes's sovereign, was built around the dynamics of life; but the Panopticon, unlike Hobbes's sovereign, was not designed to respond to, but to manipulate and transform these dynamics. The radical quality of the Panopticon was that the transformation of the individual did not begin with an attempt to persuade the individual about the error of his ways; instead, the Panopticon was constructed such that the materiality of the body could be used to control the individual's behaviour and then, by bombarding the senses, the individual's ideas. In the Panopticon, the dynamics of life were used against the individual. Bentham did not believe the Panopticon to be a new model for government in general. Most people most of the time, Bentham suggested, did not need to be subjected to the workings of the Panopticon. But Bentham's Panopticon did signal something new in the relation between life and power. Power had become capable of moving beyond simply adapting to life's dynamics; power now, at least in principle, had the ability to control human behaviour by shaping the dynamics of life.
According to Foucault, the strange logic of modern politics was formed by a fusion of (i) the transformation of the rights to life into conditional rights, and (ii) the ability to manipulate the dynamics of life. Governments had become the custodians of life. Once power became capable of shaping life the task of preserving life took on an almost contradictory meaning. The ability to manipulate life stripped it of the solidity Hobbes believed it possessed; life was no longer either given or self-evident. Instead, the political meaning of life required interpretation. This interpretation, Foucault argued, gave rise to the idea of the normal and the corresponding category of the pathological; and the articulation of these ideas could be seen in incipient forms in Locke’s distinction between human and inhuman lives, and in Bentham’s distinction between non-criminal and criminal dispositions. The normal represented life in its most healthy and pure form, whereas the pathological represented degenerate or perverse manifestations of life. After the development of these concepts, to be the custodian of life involved protecting the normal by correcting the pathological or, in the extreme case, destroying the pathological. Governing, Foucault suggested, had come to mean regulating the dynamics of life around a concept of the normal, and, in the name of life, destroying the pathological that resisted becoming normal. The modern world, Foucault claimed, was characterized by the development of technologies that would facilitate the cultivation of life by normalizing individuals. The goals of these technologies were very similar to those of the Panopticon (and Foucault suggested the Panopticon represented the ideal form of these technologies): using the materiality of the body to train and discipline individuals. Foucault believed that these technological innovations, when coupled with the continuum of the normal and the pathological, dramatically transformed the relation between the individual and power, as well as the possibilities of power itself. The relationship between the individual and power was transformed because the individual became an object to be regulated in terms of the continuum of the normal and the pathological rather than a subject whose relation to the sovereign was understood in terms of the law. The normal and the pathological thus legitimized an extra-judicial use of power. Power could no longer be
adequately represented by Hobbes’s categories—a sovereign whose existence is based upon a social covenant and who governs individuals through the creation and enforcement of the law. Instead, the division of life into a continuum of the normal and the pathological signaled that power was deployed around a new and strange logic: in the name of protecting life (the normal) governments had the right and even the duty to regulate and to destroy life (the pathological).

THE STRANGE LOGIC OF POWER

The radicalization of Hobbes’s joining of life and politics created a strange logic of power. Hobbes had joined life and politics because he believed this coupling would create a commonwealth that had as its goals peace and the self-preservation of the individual. Life became the central political category for Hobbes because he wanted to force individuals to come to terms with the true motivations for their behaviour thereby teaching them what must be done to build a strong body politic. The first moment of the radicalization of Hobbes’s conception of life occurred when peace and self-preservation were replaced as the first order of politics. Bare life, it was argued, was not enough to sustain a truly satisfying moral order. The rights to life should not be automatically granted to everyone but should be linked to the performance of certain duties, and only those who perform these duties should be granted the protection of the government. In justifying this argument Hobbes’s connection between life and politics was not abandoned. Instead, the idea of a ‘proper way of life’—a reflection of the ideals of ancient philosophy—was superimposed upon Hobbes’s understanding of life in terms of biological existence. This superimposition created a distinction between the biological existence of the individual and the political rights that were attached to life. For Hobbes, the rights of life were attached to the biological existence of the individual, not to anything like the ‘proper way of life’. As Hobbes put it, the “guilty as well as the innocent” possess the natural right to self-preservation. Once the idea of the ‘proper way of life’ was introduced, however, the right to self-preservation was no longer grounded on biological existence but on whether or not the individual lived the proper way of life. This move
allowed those coming after Hobbes to continue to invoke Hobbes's argument that the goal of government is the protection and preservation of life, while at the same time rejecting Hobbes's claim that the "guilty as well as the innocent" have the natural right to self-preservation.

The most striking expression of this radicalization of Hobbes's argument was the idea of the life that does not deserve to live. For example, in Locke's language, dangerous predators, because they fail to respect the duties of the laws of nature, have forfeited their right to life. To violate the law, Locke suggested, is to abandon the protection afforded by the law. With the development of the technological capacity to manipulate life, however, the notion of the life that does not deserve to live took on another dimension. The ability to manipulate life expanded the definition of the forms of life that should not be accorded the full protection of the law. No longer was crime the only expression of a failure to live the proper way of life. Instead, the proper way of life took on an extra-juridical meaning. The presence of this extra-juridical meaning can be seen at the very beginning of the technological advances. Even though Bentham's major preoccupation was issues of crime and punishment, Bentham also recognized that the principles of the Panopticon could be extended far beyond prisons. Hospitals, mental asylums, schools, and factories were all, Bentham argued, institutions in which the principles of the Panopticon would function very efficiently. This argument highlights the way that technological advances were to transform the relationship between the individual and political power. The ability to manipulate life gave rise to the formation of a new understanding of the goal of political power. Just as Hobbes's universal right to self-preservation was abandoned in favor of a conditional right to self-preservation, the use of law to explain the relation between the individual and political power was abandoned in favor of an extra-judicial explanation. The proper way of life was no longer measured by compliance with the law, but by the extent to which the individual's behaviour was seen to be beneficial or harmful to the population as a whole. It was not only individuals who had violated the law but also those who were shown to be detrimental to the
wealth, health, and so forth, of the body politic who were to be treated by the new technologies of power.

In this respect, innovations in technological capacity drove the articulation of the new rights of power. As power became increasingly able to manipulate life, governments were granted the right to regulate the individual according to ever more general standards. As a certain behaviour or genetic trait was made accessible for technological manipulation, governments were granted the right to regulate this behaviour or genetic trait. The theoretical arguments made on behalf of these new rights were not, at their heart, new arguments. These rights were the same rights Hobbes had accorded governments—to be given all the rights necessary to protect life. If the formal argument had not changed, its implications had. The protection of life now demanded the regulation and cultivation of life, which was to be accomplished by using the new technologies of power to engineer life. In effect, the technological innovations that allowed for the manipulation of life ensured that life became a legitimate object of political power. One of the new rights accorded to governments was the right to protect life by attacking life if and when necessary. If individuals who represented a drain on the health of the body politic could not be rehabilitated, they could be destroyed. In the extreme case, the protection of life demanded the destruction of life. It is this strange logic that, at least in part, shapes our own political experience.

THE FUTURE OF LIFE

Today, the historical roots of this strange logic have been obscured. I believe they must be recovered if we are to respond to the consequences of the development of the relationship between life and power. Questions about the nature of the relation between life and power are raised, but often these questions presume that the relation between life and power is a recent phenomenon. In part, this presumption is generated by the fact that many of the technological innovations that allow for the shaping of life are products of the very recent past; in part, it is generated by the fact that only in the recent past have these technological innovations become a presence in everyday life. Academic disciplines, such as bio-ethics, which are centred on
understanding the relation between life and power, have emerged in response to the recent appearance of new technologies. Such disciplines attempt to develop ethical frameworks that can be used to guide and regulate the way in which governments can and should use these new technologies. But in general, the contemporary ethical debate surrounding the relationship between life and power has been framed in terms of rights. In particular, the rights to privacy, to one's own body, and to life have been invoked as the boundaries that should limit the use of the new technologies of power. It is the very possibility of using the concept of rights to limit the technologies of power that demands a fuller investigation of the history of the relationship between life and power. Tracing and examining the historical roots of the relationship between life and politics demonstrates that the connection between the language of rights and the language of life predates the recent development of technologies that can manipulate life. The historical connection between the language of rights and the language of life highlights that rights are only granted meaning in and through the definition of life.\(^1\) It is not enough, then, to rely on rights to erect barriers around the technologies of power. The very status of rights, the very status of the relationship between the individual and government, has been shaped by the development of the modern definition of life (i.e., a continuum of the normal and the pathological) and the technological capacity to shape life. In conclusion, I want to highlight my own understanding about how the history of the relation between life and politics shapes the way in which we can begin considering the consequences of and the possible alternatives to the historical development of the relation between life and power.

\(^1\)It could also be argued that rights are determined by the definition of death. Perhaps the most famous example would be the report of the Ad Hoc Committee of the Harvard Medical School to Examine the Definition of Brain Death, which was published in 1968. "Our primary purpose," it reads, "is to define irreversible coma as a new criterion for death". The report recommended that the definition of death as, "the total cessation of all vital signs" should be replaced by the definition of death in terms of a "permanently nonfunctioning brain", and that this new definition should become the definition of death used by the courts.
The historical development of the concept of life links the concept of life to a certain political trajectory. Initially, the concept of life was used by Hobbes as a new starting point; Hobbes wanted to sweep away the misunderstandings and the dangers of ancient political philosophy. To accomplish this Hobbes argued that life was the first order of politics. While the argument that life was the first order of political was not abandoned by those coming after Hobbes, the understanding of life was transformed. With the transformation of the understanding of life came the transformation of the way in which governments were to engage in the protection of life. Today, that governments have a duty to protect life is beyond question. However, also beyond question is the fact that life means much more than biological existence. What is instead at question is the balance to be struck between individual rights and the government’s right to protect life: in other words, at what point does the individual have the right to privacy, and at what point does the government have the right to regulate the individual. This question of balance, however, does not question the more fundamental claim that structures contemporary politics: that the goal of government is the protection of life. The validity of this claim seems self-evident, a testament to Hobbes’s success. When the strange logic of the modern world is taken into account, however, this self-evidence should be shaken. When the historical trajectory I have mapped is taken into consideration, the claim that the protection of life is the first order of politics is wedded to the claim that to protect life, it is (sometimes) necessary to destroy life. Making life the first order of politics established a trajectory that culminated in the idea of the life that does not deserve to live.

To what extent is this trajectory a necessary outcome of the concept of life? This, I believe, is one of the fundamental questions that must be asked by contemporary political philosophy. Is it possible to return to a more Hobbesian understanding of life? To do so would necessitate an attempt to once again define life in terms of biological existence and to grant rights simply on the basis of biological existence. But would such a attempt to return to a more Hobbesian definition of life, even if it were possible, be desirable? Technological
advances make it difficult to imagine that the concept of life could be freed from the continuum of the normal and the pathological. Life is now being defined in terms of a genetic code, and almost every human behaviour and trait has been, or is in the process of being, linked to this code. This connection between genes and behaviour will, for the foreseeable future, keep the concept of life firmly linked to the continuum of the normal and the pathological. Genetics marks the latest point of intersection between life and politics, and the possibilities promised by the unlocking of the genetic code are not simply differences in degree from Bentham’s Panopticon. Bentham had indeed promised the ability to manipulate the dynamics of life but Bentham, at his most radical, never dreamed of the possibility of, as Foucault put it, making life. Gene therapy, on the other hand, holds out such a possibility. Life is not simply an object to be manipulated by power; power can now, at least in principle, create the very dynamics of life. And this promise of creating life opens a new chapter in the history of the concept of life: it is time to determine whether or not the concept of life can be separated from the continuum of the normal and the pathological thereby allowing us to judge whether or not the concept must be abandoned to escape the strange logic of modern power.

At this point in time, what is necessary is a more sustained and detailed analysis of the development of the concept of life. While I have attempted to sketch the contours of the development of the concept of life, a much more focused analysis of the technological developments is required. In my thesis I have used the history of ideas to highlight the way in which Hobbes joined life and power, and the way in which Hobbes’s framework was radicalized. Such a history of ideas, though it might serve to reveal what happened in the development of life, cannot reveal exactly how it happened; a pursuit of this “how” requires a movement beyond the history of ideas into a history of science and technology. This is not to say that the history of ideas must be abandoned but that insofar as it concerns the theoretical understanding of life, practical and theoretical developments are inseparable. Next, careful consideration must be given to the exact relation between technological innovations and the theoretical status of life. I have claimed, for example, that the “refutation” of Hobbes’s
definition of life did not take place in the realm of theory alone. Hobbes's political solution was proved "incorrect" not simply through Locke redefinition of the law of nature and natural rights; Hobbes's political solution was also proved "incorrect" by Bentham's discovery of new technological possibilities. The Leviathan, Bentham argued, might well work as Hobbes suggested; but given the principles of the Panopticon, the Leviathan would achieve its ends at too great a cost. The Leviathan was swept away by Bentham not because Hobbes misunderstood human nature, but because Hobbes did not have the technology of the Panopticon at his disposal. The nature of this refutation has to be considered carefully. To what extent does the technologically possible determine the scope of the theoretically correct? An answer to this question is needed if we are to understand how to conceptualize the new chapter of the history of life and politics that we find ourselves within.

In my thesis I have attempted to make a small beginning toward the clarification of how we have been shaped by Hobbes's revolution. I wanted to highlight that our own questions about the relation between life and power are not new but were first asked several centuries ago. Our time, however, seems to contain a unique dimension. While Hobbes could confidently claim that life was the most solid of concepts, for us the definitions of life and death have become complicated problems. That the limit between life and death cannot be clearly understood raises a problematic that urges us to question not only the political status of life, but the very status of life as a political concept. Hobbes believed that life could serve as the foundation of political science, but the fact that life has become a concept requiring sometimes esoteric interpretation leads us back to the very foundations established by Hobbes. Life is no longer able to serve as a point of universal and immediate agreement and, in this respect, the concept of life has become, as Hobbes believed about justice and the good, a concept shaped by, rather than capable of shaping, one's political interests. Just as Hobbes believed it was time to replace justice and the good with the concept of life, it is time for us to consider whether life must likewise be replaced. In this respect, to understand Hobbes's revolution and its logic is to ask the question: Has a counter-revolution become necessary? It
is this question that, I believe, demonstrates the importance of Foucault’s (failed) effort to develop techniques of resisting modern power. Even if Foucault could not develop a persuasive ethical alternative to the logic of normalization, he offered a convincing account of the dynamics and the mechanisms of the norm. Having described the technologies of power that support the norm, Foucault also, with the care of the self, attempted to put forward an ethical framework that could subvert the norm precisely because this framework did not rely on either the concept of life or the idea of rights. That Foucault’s project remained incomplete should not be seen as proof of its failure, but as an invitation to build upon the foundations he established. The extent to which Foucault is able to cultivate our desire to resist the norm will be measured by our willingness to finish what he began: it is time to investigate the implication of the technologies of power to build a new understanding of ethics that is totally free of the logic of these technologies.
Bibliography


Bibliography


———. *La Décision Métaphysique de Hobbes*.