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Is responsibility a tool of neo-liberal governmentality?

IN HIS 1978-1979 COURSE, *The Birth of Biopolitics*,¹ Foucault's examination of liberalism leads him to examine the specific qualities of one of the responses to the "crisis of liberalism"², namely neo-liberalism. This course gave rise, mainly in the English-speaking world, to a vast and diverse literature,³ in which one of the common threads turns out to be the notion of responsibility. In this paper, I will pursue the following hypothesis: Over the past thirty years, the notion of responsibility has been the subject of a specific use in the development of a new neo-liberal "art of government," an expression I borrow from Foucault, which he uses to replace the notion of power in the specific context of rethinking the State and through which he seeks to convey the singularity of the modern Western form of power.⁴ This power, also called "governmentality", refers to a power that is religious in origin but that has historically and gradually become linked in modernity

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1. M. Foucault, *Naissance de la biopolitique. Cours au Collège de France, 1978-1979*, Paris: Gallimard/Seuil, Collection Hautes Études, 2004.
 2. *Ibid.*, lecture dated January 24, 1979, p. 71.
 3. M. Senellart, "Situation des cours," in M. Foucault, *Sécurité, territoire, population. Cours au Collège de France, 1977-1978*, Paris: Gallimard/Seuil, Collection Hautes Études, 2004.
 4. B. Karsenti, "La politique du dehors: Une lecture des cours de Foucault au Collège de France (1977-1979)," in *Multitudes*, 22, Autumn 2005.

to *political* power.⁵ Specific to governmentality, however, is its individualizing tendency, and it is clear that within the *neo-liberal* form of governmentality, responsibility is one of the major tools of this individualization, whether it succeeds or fails. The main reason for this development concerns the structural reorganization of the art of government in the transition from liberalism to neo-liberalism into “indirect techniques of government” based on “a transfer of responsibility to individuals.”⁶ In this paper, I would like to examine the leads generated by Foucault regarding the place of the concept of responsibility in neo-liberal rationality, outlining each of them in connection with some of the developments to which they have given rise.

Neo-liberal pastoral power

It was as part of his course entitled *Security, Territory, Population* that Michel Foucault introduced the concept of governmentality and specified that its source was religious rather than political. Government refers to a pastoral type of power, originally exercised by priests over the faithful and producing a relationship of obedience. The governmentalization of the State,⁷ *which* no longer reigns over a territory but rather over people, began in the 16th century and gradually become hegemonic in the type of power called “liberalism.” This constituted politicized pastoral power, expressed in a hegemonic manner and endowed with sovereign and disciplinary powers.⁸ Considered from this perspective, neo-liberalism ratifies a shift toward a paradoxical type of governmentality since the apparent retreat of the State marks an even stronger but displaced form of interventionism, that is, “active politics without direction setting.”⁹

5. For a discussion of the paradigm shift – or the absence thereof – that marked the emergence of the concept of “governmentality,” see, for example, B. Karsenti, “La politique du dehors...,” *op. cit.*, and T. Lemke, “Marx sans guillemets: Foucault, la gouvernementalité, et la critique du néolibéralisme,” in *Actuel Marx*, Marx et Foucault, 2004.
6. T. Lemke, “Marx sans guillemets...,” *op. cit.*, pp. 21-23.
7. M. Foucault, *Sécurité, territoire, population*, *op. cit.*, p. 253: “What if the State was nothing but another way of governing? What if the State was just another type of government? (...) But the State is simply a stage of government, and it is not government that is an instrument of the State.”
8. *Ibid.*, pp. 111-112: “(...) by governmentality, I understand the tendency or the driving force that throughout the West and for a very long time has been ceaselessly leading, toward the preeminence of this type of government over all others [that is,] sovereignty [and] discipline.”
9. M. Foucault, *Naissance de la biopolitique*, *op. cit.*, p. 137.

“Neo-liberalism thus does not align itself with laissez-faire but rather with permanent vigilance, activity, and intervention.”¹⁰ As with Christian pastorality before it, neo-liberal government thus extends to the whole of life, disregarding the distinctions on which classical liberalism was based, namely between the political and the economic and between the public and the private spheres.¹¹ However, the type of government exercised over each individual, permanent and far-reaching though it may be, does not consist of establishing a relationship of obedience or total dependence following the example of Christian pastorality. Nor does it consist of dependence, as in the welfare state. Instead, it requires individuals to become independent and to take responsibility. This reorganization of the State occurs through a transfer of its traditional responsibilities – specifically those associated with the welfare state – to individuals and private institutions (education, security, work, etc.). In this respect, the process is the exact opposite of the Christian pastoral model, which makes the shepherd responsible for any and all in his flock.¹²

What does this “reorganization of governing techniques”¹³ involve? Firstly, the transfer of responsibilities occurs through the creation of an attachment to a new way of thinking and behaving.¹⁴ This is achieved in two stages: firstly, by making specific types of behavior undesirable, thereby detaching us from a kind of dependence on the State, and then, though simultaneously, making another kind of behavior desirable, a behavior that is deemed responsible. For the most part, this is a matter of making the attachment to the welfare state, which the State itself has taken years to build up, undesirable: the privatization of the State following a long-established policy (at least in France) of nationalizing the State.¹⁵ How then is

10. *Ibid.*

11. See, for example, the well-known analysis of the family by Gary Becker in *Human capital*, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1992 [1964], which was vehemently criticized by feminists. See also L. Benaria, “Vers une meilleure intégration du genre dans les sciences économiques,” *Cahiers genre et développement*, 2, 2001. (See also the sources referenced in this paper.)

12. M. Foucault, *Sécurité, territoire, population*, *op. cit.*, p. 171ff.

13. T. Lemke, “Marx sans guillemets...”, *op. cit.*, p. 21.

14. W. Brown, “Néolibéralisme et fin de la démocratie,” *Vacarme*, 29, Autumn 2004, p. 91.

15. J. Donzelot, *La police des familles*, Paris, Minuit, 2005 [1977]. Donzelot describes, among other things, how, through the invention of social workers, family doctors, and social housing, the State has presented itself as (and has partly made itself) indispensable throughout the 19th century and two thirds of the 20th century.

this behavior made undesirable? Consider the example of the provision of healthcare by the State, one of the pillars of the welfare state. Making the relationship of dependence on the welfare state undesirable implies increasingly associating redistribution and assistance as well as identifying the person who receives state aid as an assisted person.¹⁶ This undesirability is expressed in different forms according to social class: if poor people are perceived and are to see themselves as assisted people, even parasites, the favored group must come to consider any state redistribution it receives as a form of abuse, and it would be immoral of them to “take advantage” of State aid. Our attachment to the State is thus made undesirable by depicting it solely as a form of dependence and no longer as the condition of independence that it was for many people.¹⁷

To a large extent, his novel way of thinking and acting corresponds to an “individualization of the mode of social change.”¹⁸ How then is this change made desirable? In one of his 1978 lectures devoted to the analysis of pastoral power, Foucault highlights one of the specific characteristics of this type of power, namely “government by example.”¹⁹ For Foucault, an example represents a model to imitate, one that is likable by definition. A contemporary version of this process can be found in contemporary changes in the relationships between the State and religious organizations in the United States. Erica Bornstein examines how “the personal experience of Bush becomes a model for his policy of *charitable choice* [and what is more, we need to see in] the President’s personalization of federal policy (...) a case of ‘evangelization by example.’”²⁰ According to Foucault, this is an example of liberating responsabilization, or “empowerment.”²¹ The example to be imitated, which is characterized as responsible behavior, consists of becoming individually responsible for one’s own well-being. This is typically a “hands-free”

16. Foucault refers to the “individualization of social policy and individualization by social policy, instead of being this collectivization and socialization by and in social policy.” *Naissance de la biopolitique*, op. cit., p. 149.

17. See R. Castel and C. Haroche, *Propriété privée, propriété sociale, propriété de soi*, Paris: Hachettes Littératures, 2001, and in particular Ch. 2.

18. M. Foucault, *Naissance de la biopolitique*, op. cit., lecture dated February 14, 1979, p. 149.

19. Foucault, *Sécurité, territoire, population*, op. cit., lecture February 22, 1978, p. 175.

20. Er. Bornstein, “Charitable choice: L’humanitaire et les politiques de la foi,” *Vacarme*, 34, Winter 2006, p. 192.

21. *Ibid.*

form of government, a kind of remote control that influences the behavior of individuals without directly intervening.²² However, the examples used by this individualizing government are exceptions that do not confirm any rule. Rather, they are meant to edify, in the Christian Latin sense of “building up faith,” in this case faith in the proposition that the next exception, the next case of individual success will be my own. In this sense, it is a government that calls for self-transformation, for a change in behavior and way of thinking, but in a way that is opposed to Christian pastoral power, for which this relationship of self-modification is supposed to move toward the elimination of personal will. Instead, self-transformation under neo-liberal pastoral power is oriented toward the maximization of personal will. This mode of government goads us toward individual responsabilization by seeking to foster a desire for a form of autonomy that is understood in the very restricted and still more questionable sense of “*homo absolutus*,”²³ that is, in the literal sense of being free from any attachment.

Thus the notion of responsibility is at the heart of the neo-liberal art of government in the sense that it is based on an identification of responsibility with material self-sufficiency; that is, “moral autonomy is measured by [the] ability to take care of [oneself] – the ability to provide for one’s own needs, to pursue one’s own ambitions.”²⁴ The function of the notion of responsibility is thus to internalize and individualize in a traditional manner the social situation of individuals. However, the notion now comes with a positive connotation borrowed from the notion of *empowerment*, which is the hallmark of specifically neo-liberal usage. Thus moral responsibility contributes to the development of a new neo-liberal art of government under the novel form of *empowerment*.

22. T. Lemke, “The birth of bio-politics,” *Economy and Society*, 30, 2001, p. 201ff.

23. S. Ongaro, “De la reproduction productive à la production reproductive,” *Multitudes*, 12, p. 152.

24. W. Brown, “The American nightmare: Neo-conservatism, neo-liberalism, and the de-democratization of the United States,” translated into French in this volume, pp. 67-89.

Empowerment as a new way of steering the conduct of others²⁵

In a paper entitled “*Revolutions within: Self-government and self-esteem*,”²⁶ Barbara Cruikshank examines a Californian program aiming to promote “self-esteem and personal and social responsibility.” This program promises to “deliver a technique of subjectification that would resolve social problems from crime and poverty to gender inequality via the implementation of a social revolution, not against capitalism, racism, and inequality but against the self and the way we govern our ego.”²⁷ Individual responsibility is presented as the key to this inner revolution since “the government and experts cannot solve these problems in our place. Only if each of us recognizes our individual personal and social responsibility as part of the solution can we also feel better about ourselves.”²⁸ What is referred to here is no longer the culpabilizing form of responsibility, which is associated with guilt, but rather a liberating (moral) responsibility. “In the 21st century, each level of government in the State, and each of its programs, is designed to *empower* people to become *self-realizing* and *self-reliant*... Every citizen acknowledges personal responsibility in order to be fully engaged in the political process.”²⁹ As the author points out in her introduction, the concept of empowerment is borrowed from feminist thought and political practice. However, its meaning and purpose have been hijacked. In her introduction to the American feminist activist Starhawk, Isabelle Stengers defines empowerment as “the set of processes and methods whereby each member of a group acquires, thanks to and with others, their own capacity to think, feel, and decide, which they did not possess individually.”³⁰ In other words, it is a collective rather than an individual process, which is shared and produced jointly by individuals, as well as an individual development of abilities not directed from the outside by State programs (or even private programs, as discussed below) aimed at making individuals

25. M. Foucault, *Dits et écrits IV*, Paris: Gallimard, “The ethics of care of the self as a practice of freedom,” January 20, 1984.

26. B. Cruikshank, “Revolutions within: Self government and self esteem,” *Economy and Society*, 22, August 1993.

27. *Ibid.*, p. 231.

28. *Ibid.*, p. 232.

29. *Ibid.*, p. 239.

30. I. Stengers, afterword to Starhawk, *Femmes, magie, et politique*, Paris: Les Empêcheurs de Penser en Rond, 2003, pp. 322-323.

responsible for the duties and (dys)functions of the State, while at the same time labeling them as “irresponsible.”³¹

Self-esteem, or the lack thereof, which is presented as the key to solving the problem, is not understood as a psychological given that is already in place but as something that can be learned. “Self-esteem is a technology in the sense that it is specialized knowledge of how to esteem ourselves, how to evaluate, discipline, or judge ourselves.”³² One technique, for example, is to “write and tell one’s personal story with social goods in mind. These narratives lead people to realize that the details of their personal lives and their chance to improve their lives are inextricably linked to what is good for the whole of society.”³³ Thus acquiring self-esteem should lead us to this empowerment. A connection between this constructivist dimension of neo-liberalism and the prevalence of behavioral therapies in the English-speaking world is made by Nikolas Rose, who develops one of Foucault’s observations.³⁴ As Rose writes, “It is now possible to consider all forms of social behavior, successful and unsuccessful, not as the expression of some inner quality of the soul, but as learned techniques or social skills.”³⁵ In other words, another idea derived from the notion of empowerment is that this individual capacity is learned and manufactured. However, this idea is distorted into an individual and individualizing technique (e.g., keep a journal, focus on oneself), rather than being collective and focused on something

31. Note that “the Californian working group for fostering self-esteem and personal and social responsibility was given the responsibility by the State of preparing a report on existing research on the relationship between self-esteem and six social problems: chronic welfare dependency, alcoholism and drug abuse, crime and violence, scholastic failure, teenage pregnancy, and child abuse”, B. Cruikshank, “Revolutions Within...”, op. cit., p. 236.

32. Ibid., p. 233.

33. *Ibid.*

34. M. Foucault, *Naissance de la biopolitique*, op. cit., lecture dated March 28, p. 273ff. “When you define the object of economic analysis as the systematic set of individual responses subject to the variables of the context, you see that you can seamlessly integrate into the economy a whole series of techniques, especially those that are current and popular in the United States and that are called ‘behavioral techniques.’”

35. N. Rose, *Governing the soul: The shaping of the private self*, London: Free Association Books, 1989, p. 241, and in particular Ch. 18, “Technologies of autonomy.” On the history of these new therapies in France, see R. Castel, *La gestion des risques: De l’anti-psychiatrie à l’après psychiatrie*, Paris: Minuit, 1981. For the United States, by the same author, see *La société psychiatrique avancée: Le modèle américain*, Grasset, 1979. Issue 73 of the journal *Politix*, March 2006, “Expérience et critique du monde psy,” was recently dedicated to this question.

shared. These incentives to assume responsibility are designed as self-regulation techniques that supplement rather than replace classical regulatory mechanisms.³⁶ Our subjection to this new style of (neo-liberal) power is based on the internalization of this injunction to seek autonomy and self-responsibility. Who would not want to be responsible? Who would not want to be autonomous, consider themselves as such, and be seen as such? We will answer this question with another: Who can be responsible? Who has the means for this responsibility and its manufacture?

The exhortation to individual empowerment goes even further. Outlining the genealogy of our moral concept of disease, Monica Greco shows how the psychosomatic concept of disease, in virtue of the attention it gives to the intentional aspect of disease, has gradually given rise to a strand of medical thought that interprets disease in terms of an individual capacity for transformation and prevention.³⁷ “Self-control is thus a prerequisite for health: lack of self-control is a disease prior to the physical condition, whose symptoms are detectable as behavioral, psychological, and cognitive patterns.”³⁸ The author continues: “Moral responsibility has been associated with prevention, which represents an extension of the duties (...) assigned to the patient. It is as if (...) the role of the patient began before the beginning of the disease itself, and ‘the duty to get better’ has been changed to ‘the duty to stay healthy’.”³⁹ Thus a direct relationship can be seen as linking good health and the ability to adopt healthy behaviors and, as a result, the ability to correct risky behaviors.⁴⁰ Considered a matter of personal choice, health becomes a sign of the ability to function in a responsible manner. However, responsible behavior in the area of health no longer means simply not getting sick. It is not enough to *prevent* the disease: from now on, one must *maximize* one’s health. Hence, the implementation of programs that some companies offer to their employees that allow them to “build their customized profile as an at-risk subject”⁴¹ and to change it,

36. T. Lemke, “The birth of bio-politics”, op. cit., p. 203.

37. M. Greco, “Psychosomatic subjects and ‘the duty to be well’: Personal agency within medical rationality,” in *Economy and Society*, 22., August 1993.

38. Ibid., p. 361.

39. Ibid., p. 370.

40. Ibid., p. 360.

41. Participation in this evaluation and taking part in the program are deliberately left to the personal choice of employees and their own initiative. Greco, “Psychosomatics subjects and ‘The duty to be well’...”, op. cit., p. 369.

which implies in particular questions about lifestyle, habits, and so on. This example reveals a reduction in the notion of moral responsibility to a specific mode of behavior indexed to an extension of the economic theory of human capital to all behaviors.⁴² Neo-liberalism is thus a type of power that requires individuals to care for themselves through a kind of care of the self indexed to maximization and to appreciate themselves, since in general we take better care of things we love. From the perspective of neo-liberal rationality, therefore, responsible behavior amounts to caring for the self in the sense of maintaining a specific type of *active relationship* with oneself and the whole of one's life. This care of the self is mainly characterized by a relationship to the self involving *transformation* and *manufacture*, not a hermeneutic relationship of knowledge, at least in a programmatic form. In the program of a US company designed to perform health checks on its employees, we find the same promotion of individual and individualizing techniques we encountered in the State of California's self-esteem movement, whose aim is to "responsibilize." This involves, for example, a series of exercises presenting decision-making scenarios, questionnaires on the different reasons for making this or that choice, self-assessment tests, and so on. Moreover, the same concept emerges once again in the penal sphere, to which we will now turn our attention.

Teaching prisoners to govern themselves, teaching citizens to protect themselves

Foucault wrote a now-famous article on the changes in the penal concept of responsibility at the end of the 19th century.⁴³ Less well known is that he returned to this notion in a lecture delivered on April 4, 1979 in order to point out the distortions that, according

42. M. Foucault, *Naissance de la biopolitique*, op. cit. Lecture dated March 14, pp. 228-229ff: "Even so, the essential epistemological mutation of these neo-liberal analyses is that they claim to change what had actually constituted the object, the field of objects, the general field of reference of economic analysis (...) Economics is the science of human behavior."

43. M. Foucault, "L'évolution de la notion d'individu dangereux dans la psychiatrie légale du 19e siècle," *Dits et écrits III*, 1976-1979, Paris: Gallimard, 1994. See also, for the previous period, *Les anormaux, cours au Collège de France*, 1974-1975, Collection Hautes Études, Gallimard/Seuil, 1999.

to him, neo-liberalism gave to the liberal penal concept of responsibility.⁴⁴ While this is not one of the best-known of Foucault's texts, it gave rise to possibly the most prolific field of governmentality *studies*. We will not provide here an exposition of neo-liberal criminal theory, this has already been done elsewhere in the French language literature.⁴⁵ Rather, we will try simply to account for the specificity of the neo-liberal reworking of the notion of responsibility in the penal sphere, which to us appears to consist of a *displacement* of moralization. Neo-liberal penal theory demoralizes the criminal and the offender but only in order to propose a new moralizing discourse organized around the idea of responsible behavior. In short, criminals and offenders are no longer abnormal or monsters but individuals like anyone else who has made a miscalculation. In other words, we are moving from the classical legal responsibility for an offense combined with legal-psychiatric risk liability – with both regimes coexisting today and resulting in the difficulty with which we are familiar⁴⁶ – to a legal-economic liability based on a form of calculation copied from rational choice theory. While legal responsibility is supposed to judge an act and legal-psychiatric responsibility judges an individual (assessed as dangerous or not), the new legal-economic responsibility judges a process of reasoning (“Is this person capable of making sound choices?”). Thus there is simultaneous change in the criterion for the offense and its scientific justification.

The questions to be asked in relation to these subjects are no longer “How do their attitudes and personalities become abnormal? or How can they be corrected? but rather How do these people reason and act in criminogenic situations?, How do they make choices?, and How can their actions be diverted from crime by changing their mode of self-control in a given situation?”⁴⁷

From this perspective, we should not correct or treat such individuals but rather understand the type of reasoning that led them

44. M. Foucault, *Naissance de la biopolitique*, op. cit., lecture dated March 21, 1979.

45. G. Chantraine, “De l’usage du risque dans le gouvernement du crime: Nouveau pruden-
tialisme et nouvelle pénologie,” January 2005, <http://champpenal.revues.org>

46. On the issue of functional complementarity and the fundamental incompatibility between legal rationality and medico-psychological science, see M. Potte-Bonneville, “Foucault et le droit,” Presentation to P. Macherey’s study group “La philosophie au sens large,” January 8, 2003, available on the website of the University of Lille 2.

47. D. Garland, “Governmentality and the problem of crime: Foucault, criminology, sociology,” *Theoretical Criminology*, 1, May 1997, p. 190.

to choose to commit a crime in order to encourage them to adopt a different procedure in future. The goal here is to change ways of thinking in order to change ways of acting. This policy of behavioral transformation takes place via a twofold responsabilization strategy.⁴⁸ First, this strategy operates at the individual level through what David Garland calls “the penal technologies of the self”⁴⁹ and forms what has been called “the new penology.” Second, it consists of a transfer of the State’s traditional responsibility to protect to groups and individuals.

Garland gives the example of a personal development program offered to prisoners in a Scottish prison, called “*Training for Freedom*.”⁵⁰ Prisoners are in prison because they have made bad choices, *that is*, because they lack the ability to behave as responsible individuals, something the program is supposed to rectify. One cannot but be struck by the similarity between the individualization techniques of this program and the instrumentalization of the idea of empowerment examined above. It “consists of a series of decision-making and self-assessment exercises (...). It is a secular, elementary version of the self-examination, diary-writing and spiritual exercises that have been practiced for centuries to help individuals ‘subject’ themselves.” The corrective techniques stress the responsibility of the accused for his or her criminal act and insist on the fact that he or she must address it and take responsibility. It is not purely and simply a return to the old punitive mode, which postulates that the culprit has the attributes of a legal subject with free will. On the contrary, instead of presupposing that all adults are naturally capable of responsible and self-directed action and moral agency, contemporary penal regimes treat this as a problem to be solved through procedures that actively seek to subjectify and responsabilize individuals.

Thus the criminal who enjoys criminal behavior, or who shoulders the consequences of his or her crime, or for whom a constantly lawful life is not an option will be deemed “irresponsible” whatever the level of awareness and autonomy lies behind the criminal’s actions.⁵¹

48. D. Garland, “Les contradictions de la société ‘punitive’: Le cas britannique,” in *Actes de la recherche en sciences sociales*, September 1998, p. 56ff.

49. D. Garland, “Governmentality and the Problem of Crime ...”, *op. cit.*, p. 191ff.

50. *Ibid.*

51. *Ibid.*, pp. 190-1.

In other words, the confusion between moral and legal responsibility no longer rests on a naturalization of the first but on its identification with rational choice. Firstly, however, because this new concept of responsibility does not eliminate the previous one, the criminal is subjected to a contradictory discourse, oscillating between two moralizing concepts of responsibility.⁵² In addition, as pointed out by both David Garland in relation to the Scottish program discussed above and Gilles Chantraine in relation to a similar program in Canada, the concept does not really work. “All governmentality can only be strategic and programmatic. It never works.”⁵³ The discrepancy between the project of responsabilization as a mode of control and its application is very important.⁵⁴ For many prisoners, this project, far from being internalized and valorized, is regarded as a simple “masquerade,”⁵⁵ regarding which they show the greatest suspicion and reluctance and which they try in turn to instrumentalize for their own interests. Thus the new penal rationality represents less a demoralization of the penal sphere as a “process of (re)moralization distilled through an increased responsibility of both offenders and potential victims.”⁵⁶ Rather, neo-liberal penal theory depathologizes offenders under the terms and categories of traditional psychiatric medicine but rediscovers “an eminently moralizing dimension”⁵⁷ under the new behavioralist criteria it draws upon.

As we saw, this responsabilization strategy is twofold and continues outside prison through a security program that seeks to act upon all individuals in society, not only on those who break the law. This policy is characterized by the transfer of the traditional responsibility of the State, namely policing, to individuals and the private sector. In relation to the British case he analyses, David Garland

52. *Ibid.*, note 13, p. 207.

53. G. Chantraine, “Du gouvernement des prisons et en deçà,” 2006, forthcoming, citing Foucault, “Introduction to the 1979 seminar,” quoted by M. Senellart, “Situation des cours,” in Foucault, *Sécurité, territoire, population*, op. cit., p. 405.

54. It will be interesting to observe the situation in France, in particular given the start of a project on prison conditions aiming to produce a panorama of the contemporary prison world using a descriptive method. See J. Bérard and G. Chantraine, in *Vacarme*, 38 (Winter 2007).

55. *Ibid.*

56. G. Chantraine and J-F. Cauchie, “De l’usage du risque dans le gouvernement du crime..,” op. cit.

57. *Ibid.*

refers to a coexistence of “two heterogeneous regimes:”⁵⁸ on the one hand, a classical repressive discourse, perhaps having more to do with neoconservatism,⁵⁹ and on the other, a discourse that stresses the limits of State power. In support, Garland cites a multitude of excerpts from British government speeches in the 1980s and 1990s, all chanting in unison the idea that the state cannot do everything by itself in the area of security and that citizens must play their part and assume responsibility.⁶⁰ This new policy reveals a will to change individual behavior and attitudes, even, as David Garland writes, the “culture” of society.

The discourse of criminal justice institutions increasingly displaces responsibility for results onto those with whom they deal. For example, prisoners – or “clients” as they are already called in Scottish prisons – are said to be free to use any opportunity to amend themselves the prison may offer. Similarly, the police stress the fact that we must drive in a prudent manner and that it is the responsibility of potential victims to protect their property in order to avoid dangerous situations.⁶¹

This change consists primarily in an individualization of security, and this individual assumption of responsibility for security, which widens the gap between individuals according to means, contributes to what Robert Castel calls a “dual society.”⁶² A divide is created between those who have the means to protect and responsabilize themselves (for example, through their choice of city or neighborhood or the option of acquiring private security equipment) and the others, who are weakened by this requirement to be personally responsible and thus driven toward a “negative individuality.”⁶³ This individualized privatization of the funding and management of public security thus modifies individual behavior, but not necessarily in the direction of maximizing their potential. Rather, for many, it represents a narrowing of their way of life. This form of responsabilization individualizes “by default.”⁶⁴

58. D. Garland, “Les contradictions de la société punitive”..., op. cit., p. 63ff, “A schizoid criminology.”

59. See P. O'Malley, “Volatile and contradictory punishment,” *Theoretical Criminology*, 3, May 2, 1999.

60. D. Garland, “Les contradictions de la société ‘punitive’...”, op. cit, pp. 54 and 58.

61. *Ibid.*, p. 60.

62. R. Castel and C. Haroche, *Propriété privée*, op. cit., for example, p. 91.

63. *Ibid.*, p. 117ff.

64. *Ibid.*

Conclusion

As has been shown by many feminists, among others, the concept of responsibility that underpins neo-liberal rationality is based on the assumption of “an independent self”⁶⁵ that is inaccessible to the majority. It automatically excludes anyone other than competent adults (including children, elderly individuals, and disabled persons). It is also a self that is in theory detached from its historical and social conditions and in practice discharged of its responsibilities vis-à-vis others and of the constraints of self-reproduction. Firstly, such rationality presupposes not that individuals are responsible but that they *can* and *should* be responsible, something that is clearly not (or necessarily) generous or emancipatory since it is the expression of a demand for a particular type of behavior attached to social and material conditions that are nonexistent and unachievable for many. Secondly, it is an injunction to adopt so-called “independent” behaviors that does not take into account the fact that society is primarily based on relationships of dependence and that the behaviors in question depend on those relationships.⁶⁶ They depend, for example, on all of those (and especially all of those women) to whom a number of (mainly domestic) tasks must be *delegated* (that is, offloaded). Failing that, the individual has neither the time, the means, or the intellectual potential for being responsible (for example, by making the right choices or maximizing his or her capital). As a result, the independent self underlying this political concept of responsibility eliminates and renders invisible the majority of individuals who have neither the time, the money, or the leisure to be responsible for themselves because they are responsible for others. In other words, this government by responsabilization results in a new sexual and social divide between individuals capable or incapable of responsible behavior based on an amalgamation of moral responsibility with

65. L. Benaria, “Vers une meilleure intégration du genre dans les sciences économiques,” op. cit., p. 429.

66. See, for example, P. Paperman, “Les gens vulnérables n’ont rien d’exceptionnel,” P. Paperman and S. Laugier, *Le souci des autres: Ethique et politique du souci*, Paris: Editions de l’EHESS, Collection Raisons Pratiques,” 2005, and S. Ongaro, “De la reproduction productive à la production reproductive,” op. cit.

various individual abilities,⁶⁷ such that the effects of this divide are, via a naturalizing sleight of hand, taken for its cause.

Faced with an analysis of power in terms of governmentality, Foucault conceives resistance in terms of counter-behaviors: if governing means governing in this or that way, then resistance should consist of refusing not to be governed, but to be governed *in this or that way*.⁶⁸ The question that arises is thus that of the development of counter-neo-liberalist behaviors. Is it a matter of making dependency desirable as against the promise of individual *empowerment*? Or is it a matter of not abandoning this term and the possibilities it involves to those who instrumentalize and empty it of meaning? It is in thinking about modes of resistance and change that a critical analysis of the neo-liberal usage of the notion of responsibility as we understand it, reaches its limit. Concentrating on the distorted political use of this notion based on an analysis of the neo-liberal art of government cannot take into account the demand of the governed for a positive use of and reflection on this notion.⁶⁹ Although not taking it into account does not mean that we are prohibited from doing so, it at least implies that this task remains to be carried out.⁷⁰ Accordingly, resistance is also a question of method. While it is necessary to criticize, as we do in this paper, this use of the concept of responsibility – a critique that is often implicit in *governmentality studies* – this critique needs to be supplemented so that sound notions of responsibility and *empowerment* are not left to their detractors since this risks suggesting that they are irretrievable and thus deprives ourselves of

67. M. Friedman, “Au-delà du *care*: Démoraliser le genre.” P. Paperman and S. Laugier’s *Le souci des autres*, p. 55, discusses “care,” the “sexual division of moral labor.” See also C. Vega, “Interroger le féminisme,” *Multitudes*, 12, which discusses “governmental technologies of gender” in relation to the neo-liberal policies of the Spanish government regarding battered women.

68. M. Foucault, “Qu’est-ce que la critique? Critique et *Aufklärung*,” *Bulletin de la Société Française de Philosophie*, 84, April-June 1990.

69. On the mutations and reworkings of this term in law, politics, and morality that are currently being played out, see, for example, the “Politique non-gouvernementale” dossier in *Vacarme*, 34, Winter 2006, edited by M. Feher. Also refer to the different positions of the public in recent matters, often radically disagreeing with the political class about the scandal of contaminated blood or the question of individual responsibility regarding environmental issues.

70. It may be partly the type of object being studied by Foucault that is at the origin of governmentality studies. He examines the genealogy of a theory, not a practice, and does not draw on writings about practices but on sources expounding a theory (Gary Becker’s theory of human capital, B. F. Skinner’s behavioral theory, the criminal theory of neo-liberals, etc.), which, by definition, do not take into account other uses of this notion.

precious resources. In fact, if one argues that the neo-liberal rationality is based on, among other things, an amalgam of moral responsibility and the prescription of specific individual behaviors, we are entitled to expect a positive concept of moral responsibility to be put forward. In fact, it is by developing a use of this concept that we can defend our position and fight against its misuse. ♦

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ABSTRACT

Is responsibility a tool of neo-liberal governmentality?

After Foucault, most analyses of the neoliberal style of governmentality focus on holding the individual accountable, as the preferred new approach to the transfer of what have traditionally been State responsibilities to (certain) individuals – a process fostered by neoliberal policies. This paper looks at some of the techniques used to produce “individual responsibility,” then offers a counter-argument by focusing on the flaw on which this sophism is based in order for it to work – or at least for it to be appealing enough to forestall criticism. The trick lies in the disarming confusion between the fostering of individual moral responsibility (in the sense of the ability to act, i.e. to act responsibly), which most people desire and hope for, and the moralizing individualization of responsibility for one’s own material wellbeing, – failing which one risks being called irresponsible. Our elucidation is intended to prevent the left wing from drawing on the rich resources of empowerment processes in order to reinvent itself.