

GOVERNMENTALITY
AND THE MASTERY OF
TERRITORY IN
NINETEENTH-CENTURY
AMERICA

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Governmentality in context

In this chapter, I will spell out the particular construction of “governmentality” employed in the remainder of the study, and begin to place it in theoretical and empirical context. I explain the logic of governmentality at a fairly abstract and general level in the first section, with special emphasis on its relation to Foucault’s earlier discussions of modern power techniques, and then address three issues that immediately arise. First, I begin to link the abstract treatment of governmentality to its concrete emergence as a discursive formation embedded in late nineteenth-century American life, and explain why Part I of the study will treat the discourses surrounding the United States censuses. Next I address the theoretical difficulties raised by the decision to pursue an analysis of governmentality within an empirical study centered on the American federal state. I outline a dialectical course by which it is possible to steer an interpretation between the seemingly nominalist implications of Foucault’s thinking and the pitfalls of more “state-centered” studies, without violating the important insights of either. I then characterize the Gilded Age American federal state in a manner intended to highlight the points of compatibility and of tension between “micro” and “macro” approaches. Finally, I enumerate and briefly discuss the geographical issues inherent in any national governmental program, as a preview of the issues foregrounded in Part II.

Discipline and governmentality

Michel Foucault’s thought has been of enduring interest to geographers particularly because his theorization of modern forms of power gives such a crucial role to space as a tool of social control. This preoccupation first emerged in his 1970s explication of disciplinary power. Foucault’s understanding of disciplinary power has its classic expression in *Discipline and punish*.¹ Although the argument has been rehearsed both inside and outside

¹ M. Foucault, *Discipline and punish* (New York, 1977).

geography, its basic outline needs to be reviewed here.² This is because the principles by which disciplinary power operates remained central to Foucault's later explorations of governmentality. These later explorations were still at a relatively early and schematic stage when Foucault died in 1984, but the directions taken since that time by his colleagues and intellectual inheritors would be unintelligible in the absence of the groundwork laid by Foucault's earlier researches into modern power relations.

In his analyses of "discipline," Foucault documented the emergence, during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in Europe, of a new form of power different from those based on violence or law. This disciplinary power was rooted in visibility and surveillance, and involved the minute regulation and "normalization" of individual behavior through impartial observation and standardized, calculated punishment or correction of behavioral abnormalities. For Foucault, the ideal blueprint of disciplinary power was the "Panopticon" proposed by the English social reformer Jeremy Bentham as a model for English prisons. In the Panopticon, prisoners would be arranged in a multistoried ring of backlit cells around a central tower manned by watchers. The constant threat of visibility would, through an anonymous and impartial system of calculated punishments, encourage inmates to behave normally. At the same time, the detailed knowledge accumulated by prison authorities primarily for the purpose of control would be available also for use in the study of human physiology and behavior. As I have argued elsewhere, systems of control structured in this way can be seen to attach to individual activities what I call (adapting some of Foucault's concepts) "cycles of social control."³ In an ideal panoptic system, each activity is (1) subject to constant threat of observation; and when observed (2) judged as to whether it is sufficiently "normal" or "regular," and finally, if not judged acceptable; it is (3) punished or corrected in an impartial, impersonal way. Although it takes very different forms in different situations and at different spatial scales, this cycle structures all forms of power organized around relations of vision. It will be helpful in the present study as a way to structure the historical analysis in Part II.

Foucault claimed that the basic panoptic logic, though it emerged unevenly and with considerable variation in different institutional contexts, and was

² F. Driver, *Power and pauperism: The workhouse system, 1834–1880* (New York, 1993), 10–15; "Bodies in space: Foucault's account of disciplinary power," in C. Jones and R. Porter (eds.), *Re-Assessing Foucault* (New York, 1992); G. Deleuze, *Foucault* (Minneapolis, MN, 1988); H. Dreyfus and P. Rabinow, *Michel Foucault: Beyond structuralism and hermeneutics*, 2nd ed. (Chicago, 1983); C. Philo, "Foucault's Geography," *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 10 (1992), 137–161.

³ M. Hannah, "Space and social control in the administration of the Oglala Lakota ("Sioux"), 1871–1879," *Journal of Historical Geography* 19, 4 (1993), 412–432; "Imperfect panopticism: Envisioning the construction of normal lives," in G. Benko and U. Strohmayer (eds.), *Space and social theory: Interpreting modernity and postmodernity* (New York, 1997), 344–359.

always only imperfectly realized in practice, gradually and inconspicuously colonized many aspects of everyday life in the modern West. Notwithstanding the debates that have raged around every aspect of Foucault's argument, it would be difficult to imagine a clearer illustration of the mutual constitution of knowledge and power. Thus it is not surprising that Foucault's analysis of the Panopticon has acquired the status of an archetype in critical research on modern social control, or that "panoptic" has become a generic adjective.

Toward the end of the 1970s, Foucault began to extend and generalize his theorization of the mutual constitution of power and knowledge, and to explore the ways it operated at larger scales. His preliminary analysis of "biopower" drew disciplinary power into a larger field, linking the regulation of individual bodies with larger-scale regulation of the "social body" through discourses of expertise regarding sexuality.⁴ Biopower is here understood literally as "power over life." Foucault provides a concise overview of the historical emergence of biopower, and of its articulation with discipline:

In concrete terms, starting in the seventeenth century, this power over life evolved in two basic forms; these forms were not antithetical, however; they constituted rather two poles of development linked together by a whole intermediary cluster of relations. One of these poles – the first to be formed, it seems – centered on the body as a machine: its disciplining, the optimization of its capabilities, the extortion of its forces, the parallel increase of its usefulness and its docility, its integration into systems of efficient and economic controls, all this was ensured by the procedures of power that characterized the *disciplines: an anatomo-politics of the human body*. The second, formed somewhat later, focused on the species body, the body imbued with the mechanisms 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 biopolitics of the population*. The setting up, in the course of the classical age, of this great bipolar technology . . . characterized a power whose highest function was perhaps no longer to kill, but to invest life through and through.⁵

Sex and sexuality were particularly charged issues in this context because they were located "at the pivot of the two axes along which developed [this] entire political technology of life."⁶ To attempt to regulate sexual activity was to link bodily disciplines with the management of populations. The empirical heart of the study is an exploration of the expert discourses that emerged to make these links. Foucault distinguishes "four great strategic unities which, beginning in the eighteenth century formed specific mechanisms of knowledge and power centered on sex": the "hysterization of women's bodies," the "pedagogization [subjection to careful guidance] of children's sex," the "socialization of procreative behavior" and the "psychiatrization of perverse pleasure." These

⁴ M. Foucault, *The history of sexuality*, vol. I, *An introduction* (New York, 1978).

⁵ *Ibid.*, 139. ⁶ *Ibid.*, 145.

four strategies targeted four objects of knowledge: the hysterical woman, the masturbating child, the Malthusian couple and the perverse adult. All four had to be managed in the interest of enhancing “life.”⁷

Foucault intended his analysis as a critique of the Freudian “repressive hypothesis,” the idea that, especially in the Victorian age, modern life has been accompanied by a fundamental suppression of sex and sexuality as topics of discussion and as necessary, legitimate and rewarding aspects of social existence. On the basis of his historical research, Foucault argues that, on the contrary, the nineteenth century *in particular* saw an explosion in public discussions of sex and sexuality.⁸ He had originally planned to work backwards from the nineteenth century to investigate earlier regulatory and discursive practices surrounding sex (for example, the practice of confession). But he decided to take a different tack, and the last two published volumes of his history of sexuality concerned practices of sexual self-constitution in Greek and Roman antiquity.⁹ In his explanation of the switch, Foucault made clear that he had not changed course because there was anything fundamentally “wrong” with the focus on biopower; it was only that it led him into a line of questioning which diverged from his larger purpose in writing a history of sexuality.¹⁰ However, it was not until much later that many in the Anglophone world realized that he had also continued to pursue his interest in “methods of power capable of optimizing forces, aptitudes, and life in general without at the same time making them more difficult to govern,” and that this had led him to conceptualize “governmentality.”¹¹

Before moving on to governmentality as such, it is worth dwelling at greater length on the earlier theorization of biopower. Many of the issues I will treat in the process of contextualizing governmentality in the late nineteenth-century United States are already foreshadowed here. The first is that of gender. Although Foucault does not develop the point very far, it is fairly obvious that the fourfold regulation of sexuality traced in the earlier study meshes easily with a patriarchal, paternalistic gender ideology. While the four “targets” of regulation included men as well as women, the experts doing the regulating were (as they still are) in practice mostly men, and the purpose of the four strategies was to bolster the patriarchal nuclear family as the lynchpin of social order and health. Given this set of circumstances, a general ideological “masculinization” of key aspects of social regulation is not difficult to imagine. Foucault’s analysis of biopower renders more intelligible, for example, the sort of link between regulation and manhood drawn so vividly by Francis Walker (see Chapters 4 and 6).

Second, Foucault recognizes in this early study that a logic like that of bio-

⁷ *Ibid.*, 103–105. ⁸ *Ibid.*, 8–13.

⁹ M. Foucault, *The history of sexuality*, vol. II, *The use of pleasure* (New York, 1986); *The history of sexuality*, vol. III, *The care of the self* (New York, 1988).

¹⁰ Foucault, *The use of pleasure*, 4–6. ¹¹ Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, vol. I, 141.

power is never nested in a cultural context as a “pure,” self-contained island of discourse and practice. Rather, it is always shot through with residues and traces of other external ideologies, perhaps survivals from earlier moments in the history of particular cultures. This point comes out most clearly in Foucault’s discussion of the survival (throughout the nineteenth century) of an older “thematics of blood” connected with the death-oriented ideologies of social order (violence, purity, inheritance, breeding) that had preceded the new concern with life:

Beginning in the second half of the nineteenth century, the thematics of blood was sometimes called on to lend its entire historical weight toward revitalizing the type of political power that was exercised through the devices of sexuality. Racism took shape at this point (racism in its modern, “biologizing,” statist form): it was then that a whole politics of settlement (*peuplement*), family, marriage, education, social hierarchicization, and property, accompanied by a long series of permanent interventions at the level of the body, conduct, health, and everyday life, received their color and their justification from the mythical concern with protecting the purity of the blood and ensuring the triumph of the race.¹²

This use of biopolitical means for racial ends is perfectly illustrated by Francis Walker’s involvement in the American movement for immigration restriction (see Chapters 6 and 7).

The final foreshadowing worth brief mention here concerns the relation between social regulation and the requirements of industrial capitalism. Foucault remained wary until the end of “grand narratives” such as that of Marxist history, and for very solid reasons. But in his 1978 work we can glimpse the possibility of an articulation between his supple “non-totalizing” analyses and more sweeping narratives, or at least an acknowledgement that the two approaches need not always preclude each other:

[B]io-power was without question an indispensable element in the development of capitalism; the latter would not have been possible without the controlled insertion of bodies into the machinery of production and the adjustment of the phenomena of population to economic processes. But this was not all it required; [capitalism] also needed the growth of both these factors, their reinforcement as well as their availability and docility . . .¹³

Although he would never go out of his way to stress the possibility of common ground, his work on governmentality would multiply the opportunities to connect his perspective with one centered more on general categories such as “mode of production” or “the state” (see below, p. 32). Some sort of connection would in any case have been impossible to avoid, given that the analysis of governmentality has at its core an analysis of discourses of political economy.

¹² *Ibid.*, 149. ¹³ *Ibid.*, 141.

This extended stopover in Foucault's discussion of biopower should bring home the point that any such technologies of control are unavoidably intertwined with many different sorts of ideological and material mediations. These mediations originate in the "external" cultural and political environment into which new logics of social control emerge, but they may nevertheless play fundamental roles in determining precisely *how* social regulation operates in concrete, geo-historical practice.

The 1991 publication of *The Foucault Effect* made many readers in the anglophone world aware for the first time that Foucault had not simply dropped the study of the history of social regulation around 1980 to pursue the new line of inquiry into "techniques of the self" that led to his last two book-length studies.¹⁴ His essay "On governmentality" was published in English as far back as 1979, but it must have languished relatively unremarked through most of the 1980s, since there were few anglophone responses to it before 1990.¹⁵ As the 1991 collection reveals, in tandem with his work on practices of sexual self-constitution in antiquity, Foucault and a number of European collaborators continued to flesh out the history of biopower. The result was a more nuanced general history of larger scale social regulation, and, of particular importance to this study, a key insight into the way the rise of "liberal" political economy qualified the Western practice of biopower.

Governmentality has a range of meanings, denoting both a general analytical category and more historically specific forms of power that manifest some or all of the features of an abstract logic.¹⁶ In the specific historical sense in which I will employ it, it means roughly what I have been calling large-scale biopower, but with a more explicit connection drawn between demographic and economic trends and processes. Governmentality is "the ensemble formed by the institutions, procedures, analyses and reflections, the calculations and tactics that allow the exercise of this very specific albeit complex form of power, which has as its target population, as its principal form of knowledge political economy, and as its essential technical means apparatuses of security [modern institutions for the improvement and administration of life]."¹⁷ In an excellent and influential essay, Nikolas Rose and Peter Miller provide an overview of the full range of phenomena that can be understood to fall under the category of governmentality.¹⁸ These phenomena range in scale from individual "self-help" initiatives to life insurance provision to the policies of nation-states. My usage of the term will be much more restricted, owing in

¹⁴ G. Burchell, C. Gordon and P. Miller (eds.), *The Foucault effect: Studies in governmentality* (Chicago, 1991).

¹⁵ M. Foucault, "On governmentality," *Ideology and Consciousness* 6 (1979), 5–21.

¹⁶ M. Foucault, "Governmentality," in Burchell *et al.*, *The Foucault effect*, 102–103; C. Gordon, "Governmental rationality: An introduction," in *ibid.*, 3.

¹⁷ Foucault, "Governmentality," 102.

¹⁸ N. Rose and P. Miller, "Political power beyond the state: Problematics of government," *British Journal of Sociology* 43, 2 (1992), 173–205.

part to the nature of my empirical concerns and in part to my commitment to explore the scope for common ground between Foucault and other theorists. The principal restriction will be an almost exclusive focus on programs and institutions explicitly geared toward national-scale social regulation. I take as one cue for my narrower usage the additional claim Foucault makes in the same essay that governmentality has tended “to predominate over sovereignty and discipline, and to generate a whole complex of knowledges” in the modern era.¹⁹ This clearly implies that although governmentality also involves surveillance, it is something other than merely large-scale discipline or the aggregate system of disciplinary institutions. For Foucault, “we need to see things not in terms of a replacement of a society of sovereignty by a disciplinary society and the subsequent replacement of a disciplinary society by a society of government; in reality one has a triangle, sovereignty – discipline – government, which has as its primary target the population and as its essential mechanism the apparatuses of security.”²⁰ Governmentality and discipline are articulated but not identical. Governmentality, like discipline, constructs (not merely “manipulates”) its objects, but unlike discipline, it constructs them as objects that should not be unduly manipulated. I will be concerned with it chiefly as a national form of biopower that more or less successfully infuses state institutions and their behavior. This may seem a problematic way to identify governmentality, since I treat the “state” as an established fact in a manner generally avoided by Foucault. Yet if we return to the genealogy of governmentality traced by Foucault and his collaborators, it will be apparent that the national state is presupposed as an important context for the basic logic of power. Since this issue has such important implications for the possibility of linking Foucauldian to other sorts of analysis, I will return to it again at greater length below.

With the concept of governmentality Foucault and his collaborators in effect replaced the earlier, monolithic notion of a “biopolitics of population,” a discourse and practice of social regulation which emerges in the eighteenth century and persists (with minor variations) until the present, with a more finely differentiated series of stages in social thought. In the genealogy these theorists have constructed, the key insight which marks specifically governmental thinking can be credited to the “physiocratic” theorists of eighteenth-century France, who realized that the regularities displayed by social statistics implied the existence of a realm of social reality outside the state, a realm possessing its own independent laws of development and behavior.²¹ But in keeping with inherited assumptions about state knowledge as the self-knowledge of the sovereign, the physiocrats continued to believe that this socioeconomic realm could be completely known by the state. According to Foucault,

¹⁹ Foucault, “Governmentality,” 103. ²⁰ *Ibid.*, 102.

²¹ Foucault, “Governmentality,” 99; G. Burchell, “Peculiar interests: Civil society and governing ‘the system of natural liberty’,” in Burchell, *et al.*, *Foucault effect*, 126.

Adam Smith's notion of the "invisible hand" represented the crucial next step in the development of Western thinking about social regulation. It codified the foundation of the liberal view, in which, for the first time, social and economic processes were seen to be opaque to the sovereign, and were seen to operate according to an independent set of laws. For these reasons, the state had to be dissuaded from attempting comprehensive regulation of society.²² "The advent of liberalism coincides with the discovery that political government could be its own undoing, that by governing over-much, rulers thwarted the very ends of government."²³ In short, the relationship between state and society had come to be seen, by the late eighteenth century, as one of exteriority, and the character of "society" as quite complicated, involving people in their relations with "wealth, resources, means of subsistence, the territory with its specific qualities, climate, irrigation, fertility, etc. . . . [with] customs, habits, ways of acting and thinking, etc. . . . [and with] accidents and misfortunes such as famines, epidemics, death, etc."²⁴

According to the wisdom of liberal political economy, rulers could only prosper if this complex web of people, things and processes prospered, but this would be possible only if the state allowed, encouraged or facilitated the unhindered operation of socioeconomic laws that governed "civil society," laws which it could not completely understand or control. There was still a definite role for knowledge as an instrument of power, but no longer through direct and comprehensive manipulation. On the liberal view, knowledge had to provide a basis not only for programs of state action, but prior to that, for decisions about whether state action would be appropriate at all.²⁵ In order to deal with these demands, the state had not only to preserve society and economy, but also to "ensure the existence of political spaces within which critical reflections on the actions of the state are possible . . . [i.e.] observe and maintain the autonomy of the professions and the freedom of the public sphere from political interference."²⁶ In the logic of liberal thought, the social sciences came to play a pivotal role, because they "provide[d] a way of representing the autonomous dynamics of society and assessing whether they should or should not be an object of regulation."²⁷

To sum up, then, governmentality, like discipline and like other forms of biopower, is at this general level a rationality of social control based in the mutual constitution of knowledge and power. It constructs an object of knowledge, the social body, through discursive practices which, in giving it

²² Burchell, *Peculiar interests*, 134; Gordon, "Governmental rationality," 20; T. Porter, *The rise of statistical thinking, 1820–1900* (Princeton, NJ, 1986), 17.

²³ A. Barry, T. Osborne and N. Rose, "Introduction," in A. Barry, T. Osborne and N. Rose (eds.), *Foucault and political reason: Liberalism, neo-liberalism and rationalities of government* (Chicago, 1996), 8. ²⁴ Foucault, "Governmentality," 93.

²⁵ T. Osborne, "Security and vitality: Drains, liberalism and power in the nineteenth century," in Barry, et al., *Foucault and political reason*, 101.

²⁶ Barry, Osborne and Rose, "Introduction," 10. ²⁷ *Ibid.*, 9.

intelligible form, render this object at least partially susceptible to rational management. As such, governmentality, too, is fundamentally structured around cycles of social control linking observation, normalizing judgment and regulation. But unlike its genealogical predecessors, governmentality involves a more complicated version of the cycle. Observation has two purposes: it not only provides a means of comparing some construction of social reality with a norm; it also helps the governing authorities decide whether there are limits to its ability to enforce or achieve the norm, whether the attempt should be made to correct any perceived deviations. This more circumspect approach to regulation goes hand in hand with an attitude toward the social body of care, cultivation and enhancement, an attitude less evident in the exercise of disciplinary power. While the disciplines are also designed to enable, their point is less to enable any pre-existing interests or goals of the individuals they “subject,” but rather to enable non-disruptive integration into an externally defined social order, whether or not such integration is desired by those subject to it. In short, governmentality at a national scale involves more respect for the integrity and autonomous dynamics of the social body.

The questions raised by the notion of governmentality can be classed in three broad categories. They all have to do in different ways with context. (1) How does governmentality actually emerge in geo-historically specific social settings (how does its advent affect, and how is it affected by, the specifics of these settings)? (2) To what extent is it theoretically permissible to weave a Foucauldian view of governmentality into an empirical study centered on the activities of “the American federal state”? (3) What are the *geographical* issues inherent in national-scale programs of governmentality? These questions are my overarching concern in the remainder of this book. Here I will lay out their basic coordinates within the context of late nineteenth-century America.

The concrete emergence of American governmentality as a discourse

What sort of phenomenon is governmentality, in concrete terms? As a “rationality” or a “logic,” it is first of all a discourse (or set of discourses). Recall that the discourse of political economy is at the heart of Foucault’s definition. Its broad purpose is to persuade those who govern to do so according to the principles of political economy (for example, to move cautiously in regulating economies). But this is only a general guideline. How does the state actually learn about (i.e., construct) society in order to decide just how to govern it? What Michael Mann notes about bureaucracies in the West was probably true in general of every aspect of the expansion of modern power techniques during the late nineteenth century: they were “everywhere preceded by [their] ideologies.”²⁸ Most governmental measures had been advocated for some time

²⁸ M. Mann, *The Sources of social power*, vol. II, *The rise of classes and nation-states, 1760–1914* (New York, 1993), 472–473.

before they were put into wide-spread practice. Indeed, as Rose and Miller argue, “[w]e do not live in a governed world so much as a world traversed by the ‘will to govern,’ fuelled by the constant registration of ‘failure,’ the discrepancy between ambition and outcome, and the constant injunction to do better next time.”²⁹ This was all the more true in the late nineteenth-century United States, where most proposals for the implementation of national-scale governmental programs were never operationalized.

In a crucial contribution to *The Foucault effect*, Giovanna Procacci argues that governmentality has actually involved two distinct levels of discourse: the familiar but relatively abstract and deductive level of political economy, and the more mundane practical level of “social economy.”³⁰ She begins with the problem of “pauperism” (chronic poverty), which posed an unsolvable puzzle to political economists in the early nineteenth century. Pauperism confronted them with the spectacle of people whose condition should have been impossible given the contemporary wisdom that free markets and the invisible hand were universally beneficial and redemptive social forces. Paupers were living, breathing proof that leaving economies alone was an insufficiently subtle way of accommodating independent economic dynamics. In parallel with political economy, there accordingly arose another level of discourse, inspired by the more empirical German tradition of historical economics. “Social economists” insisted on confronting and studying the *reality* of pauperism. Their discourse is portrayed by Procacci as a “*savoir* . . . mediating between the analytical-programmatic levels of the sciences [political economy and its deductive approach] and the exigencies of direct social intervention.”³¹ This *savoir* (as opposed to the more self-consciously scientific “*connaissance*” of political economy) “relocates the object thus scientifically delineated within a field of relationships in which the instruments of the scientific project [in this case, mostly deductively derived categories and the abstract relationships between them] are forced into contact with all the rigidity, inertia and opacity which the real displays in its concrete functioning.”³² This definition characterizes a general approach, which applies to many other issues in addition to pauperism, and which will be very helpful in making sense of Francis Walker’s efforts. Two features of social economy are particularly relevant to the story I tell below: (1) unlike political economy, social economy is necessarily and openly

²⁹ Rose and Miller, “Political power beyond the state,” 191.

³⁰ G. Procacci, “Social economy and the government of poverty,” in Burchell *et al.*, *Foucault effect*, 151–168. ³¹ *Ibid.*, 156.

³² *Ibid.*, 157. Rose and Miller distinguish *three* levels of governmentality: “rationality,” “program” and “technology,” the last of these embracing the inscriptions, recordings and constructions of social problems that go on in various locales of expertise located outside state apparatuses but articulated with them. Since the technologies I will be investigating are *state* technologies more tightly associated with “programs,” I will treat Procacci’s “social economy” as a category including both “programs” and “technologies,” and “political economy” as roughly equivalent to what Rose and Miller term “rationality.”

concerned with morality because its object is concrete socioeconomic (not merely economic) order; (2) social economy gives a prominent role to statistics, which in the political economy of the period tend to appear only as supports for deductive conclusions. Both of these features imply that social economy cannot simply rely on *laissez-faire* principles as guidelines for deciding what not to regulate. Governmentality, as *savoir* and *connaissance*, is something more subtle than blind reliance on this one (in)famous liberal axiom. It is in making such subtlety possible that censuses and other statistical forms of knowledge play their most important role.

Procacci's distinction dovetails (albeit imperfectly) with certain aspects of Mary Poovey's analysis of "the modern fact."³³ The modern fact has, according to Poovey, been understood as simultaneously an objectively observable concrete particular and a piece of "evidence" for unseen laws (whether natural or social). But Western thought has never succeeded in certifying that knowledge of facts can be connected successfully in accurate accounts of laws. After the failure of a long series of more or less explicit philosophical attempts to solve this problem, Poovey argues that it was finally tamed, though not solved, by the formalized separation of fact-gathering and systematic interpretation into different professions ("statistics" and "political economy").³⁴ To put it a bit more bluntly than Poovey would, if political economists could disown responsibility for the accuracy of facts, statisticians could disown responsibility for the way they were interpreted. The persistence of the fundamental epistemological problem with the modern fact could be blurred by "sleight of discipline." Liberal governmentality, consisting as it did of an articulation of political economy and statistics, incorporated the problem of the modern fact without solving it. The connection between facts and systematic knowledge is constructed, according to both Poovey and Procacci, through morality.

This means that its discourses necessarily become entangled with ideological components of the larger culture which relate to the definition of proper social order. In his discussion of biopower and sexuality, Foucault foreshadowed two specific entanglements of this kind: with gender and racial ideologies. Along with the notion of class already central to political economy, these two issues structured the most common generic understandings of social order in Victorian American culture. Francis Walker, comprehensive "governmental subject" that he was, not only involved himself prominently in debates at both levels of discourse, but also in all three wider ideological issues. I will treat his views on class and race at some length in Chapters 6 and 7, but it is my contention that gender was for him the single most important dimension of social order in one crucial sense. While race was also a key dimension in which Walker came to understand social order in an abstract sense, he

³³ M. Poovey, *A history of the modern fact: Problems of knowledge in the sciences of wealth and society* (Chicago 1998). ³⁴ *Ibid.*, 304–305.

connected problems of social order to concrete individual lives and activities through the discourse of manhood. Like most social commentators of his age, Walker was steeped in individualism, and thus could not conceive of larger social forces or phenomena entirely apart from the individual actions through which they were expressed. Yet for Walker, the individual was most primordially a *gendered* being. Thus Chapter 4 will be devoted to understanding how he became so concerned with “manhood,” and how this concern colored his interventions in the discursive formation I will have explained in Chapters 2 and 3. My claim is not that governmentality *must* be structured fundamentally by gender issues, but rather (1) that we should not be surprised to find that it often is, and (2) that through an instance in which it was, we can learn something more general about how governmental rationality interacts with substantive ideologies of social order.³⁵

At the most basic level, the possibility of national governmental objects presupposes the possibility of national phenomena, and in this sense is predicated on the (at least imagined) existence of a national state. Objects must also be constituted so as to be (in principle, at least) *rationaly manipulable*, that is, manipulable in a way that avoids the appearance of arbitrariness. Crucially, this requires that it be possible to define with some precision what state the “social body” is in at any given time, that it be possible also to define more or less precisely some standard of “good condition” against which its actual condition can be compared, and that it be possible to determine on the basis of non-arbitrary grounds whether intervention in the workings of society is justified in any given case. These general rules of formation strongly favor the constitution of governmental objects on the basis of some kind of *quantitative measurement scheme*. This is fairly obvious in the case of rational manipulability: “[q]uantification is a way of making decisions without seeming to decide,” a way of exercising “power minus discretion.”³⁶ But numbers are also “particularly well suited for communication that goes beyond the boundaries of locality and community.”³⁷ Bruno Latour puts the problem of rational, national manipulation nicely: “how to act at a distance on unfamiliar events, places and people? Answer: by somehow bringing home these events places and people. How can this be achieved, since they are distant? By inventing means that (1) render them *mobile* so that they can be brought back; (2) keep them *stable* so that they can be moved back and forth without additional distortion, corruption or decay, and (3) are *combinable* so that whatever stuff they are made of, they can be cumulated, aggregated, or shuffled like a pack of cards.”³⁸ Numbers fit the bill nicely.

Some caution should be exercised here to avoid naturalizing statistics as the

³⁵ See Jacques Donzelot, *The policing of families* (Baltimore, MD, 1997 [1979]).

³⁶ T. Porter, *Trust in numbers: The pursuit of objectivity in science and public life* (Princeton, NJ, 1995), 8, 98. ³⁷ *Ibid.*, ix.

³⁸ B. Latour, *Science in action* (Cambridge, MA, 1987), 223.

transhistorical *telos* of representations of social reality. In her *History of the modern fact*, Mary Poovey makes it clear that the process by which numbers came to be associated with “objectivity” in social science was torturous, indirect, contingent and always reversible.³⁹ Among other things, the political economists who finally succeeded in placing statistics at the core of modern social science in the early nineteenth century had to stabilize a dubious association between precision and accuracy, forge a link between numbers and the credibility of their users, overcome the widespread suspicion of the “amorality” of numbers that had led to political economy’s stigmatization as “the dismal science,” and invest an attitude of “disinterest” with positive epistemological value. Poovey suggests that this rickety, provisional conceptual network comprising the modern fact has long been in decline, eclipsed by the “postmodern” fact based in virtual modeling. In my view, this judgment is a bit hasty. The ease with which we can accept Latour’s and Porter’s explanations for the usefulness of statistical representation indicates that the modern fact is still alive and well. Poovey’s point that the primacy of statistics is an historical, contingent phenomenon is well taken, but the present study is still located within the modern phase of epistemic history, and therefore makes use of some of its assumptions.

A truly comprehensive account of national-scale, late nineteenth-century American governmentality would have to include in its purview all significant metrical schemes that met these criteria, for example the early eastern and later, more spectacular western land surveys; the township and range system and other grids of land division; the various mineral, agricultural and forest surveys; the anthropological inventories begun by John Wesley Powell; and all the cartographic projects undertaken to order the information provided by these systems of observation.⁴⁰ I will confine myself in this study to the nineteenth-century system of “social statistics,” but many of the issues introduced here will be more generally relevant to other national measuring schemes (see Chapter 5).

An American fascination (particularly in the nineteenth century) with social statistics has been noted by a number of scholars, and is given an interesting explanation by Theodore Porter.⁴¹ Porter begins within the modern era of the fact identified by Poovey, viewing statistics as a “strategy of communication,” and argues that statistics will tend to predominate over other forms of communication wherever there is a need for specialized knowledge coupled with a strong public distrust of secretive expertise, and wherever specialists are

³⁹ Poovey, *History of the modern fact*.

⁴⁰ A. H. Dupree, “The measuring behavior of Americans,” in G. Daniels (ed.), *Nineteenth century American science: A reappraisal* (Evanston, IL, 1972), 22–37.

⁴¹ P. C. Cohen, *A calculating people: The spread of numeracy in early America* (Chicago, 1982); R. C. Davis, “The beginnings of American social research,” in Daniels (ed.) *Nineteenth century American science*, 152–178; Porter, *Trust in numbers*.

vulnerable to the consequences of distrust. This pattern is especially apparent in the United States, which nourishes a long tradition of distrust of expertise (part of a more general tradition of anti-intellectualism), and where bureaucracies, scientific disciplines and other authoritative organizations are not well insulated from public displeasure.⁴² Especially in the early nineteenth century, descriptive statistical knowledge was thought comprehensible enough to be accessible to many Americans, and thus to be an excellent basis for decision making in the context of a relatively egalitarian democracy. Yet the need for specialization was still relatively modest at that time; as the century wore on, the transparency of authoritative organizations *and their numbers* would decrease.

There were three main streams of statistically based social research in the period before the Civil War: the first and most important component of the “statistical movement” developed around the “administrative needs of the state and the economy and found expression mainly in the Census and other official statistics”; the second stream centered on vital statistics stemming from the epidemiological research of medical doctors and the demographic calculations of insurance actuaries; the third stream concerned “moral statistics” gathered in the effort to tackle urban social problems.⁴³ The latter two streams of the statistical movement were not at first national in scope. The discourses of insurance, spurred in part by the occasional outbreak of epidemics and in part by ongoing international debates about the salubrity of the American climate and the vigor of its animal and human life, nevertheless lacked even a rudimentary nationwide life table until 1868. Early “moral statistics” on crime and prisons, pauperism, insanity and other social pathologies, were even more local in character, rarely extending up to the level of individual states.⁴⁴

To see how a national entity suited to governmental management was statistically constituted in the years following the Civil War we must focus on the first of Davis’s three streams: national governmental statistics. From the earliest years of the republic, there were two main kinds of regularly collected national statistics: statistics of international trade, and decennial census statistics.⁴⁵ In a sense, they complemented each other: international trade numbers helped define the nation externally as an aggregate economic entity distinct from others with which it interacted, while census statistics defined it internally. Since the latter register the formation of social as well as narrowly economic objects, I will focus in the remainder of this study on the nineteenth-century US Census. During the Gilded Age, the US Census “became a full-

⁴² R. Hofstadter, *Anti-intellectualism in American life* (New York, 1962); Porter, *Trust in numbers*, 6–8. ⁴³ Davis, “The beginnings of American social research,” 153.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 167–170, 171–175.

⁴⁵ J. Cummings, “Statistical work of the Federal Government of the United States,” in J. Koren (ed.), *The history of statistics: Their development and progress in many countries* (New York, 1918), 576–577.

fledged instrument to monitor the overall state of American society,” and thus began to fulfil the vision of mid-century practitioners of social statistics, who had seen it as “the centerpiece of any new effort” to “monitor, analyze and organize” the development of the American political and social economy.⁴⁶ Because population issues were what provoked Francis Walker’s extensive, revealing and influential interventions in the spatial politics of governmentality, the lion’s share of my attention will be directed at the population schedules in their connection to social policy. As I will treat it, then, governmentality was a discursive formation centered on the social and demographic dimensions of the US Census, both understood within a general political economic problematic. This discursive formation will be the topic of Chapters 2 and 3.

The American state, state theory and governmentality

A focus on national censuses brings me face to face with the question of how to understand the relationship between governmentality and the national state. The existing literature on governmentality reveals an ambivalent attitude toward the category of “the state.” On the one hand, the term is used with great frequency, since no matter the scale at which its operation is being studied, the logic of governmentality presupposes some sort of governing “agency” or “subject,” some actor or actors behaving according to its dictates. At any scale above that of individual (or perhaps family) government, “the state” is an obvious candidate, as the works cited in the genealogy given above attest. On the other hand, in keeping with Foucauldian analytical practice, there is a pervasive and principled distrust of any category as monolithic as “the state.” As with “the human subject” in Foucault’s earlier researches, “the state” is characterized at the level of theory as a contingent social construct, an “effect” lacking internal unity, clear boundaries separating it from its context, or autonomous causal powers. This ambivalence animates Foucault’s seminal paper on governmentality, in which a long historical discussion of its logic, unintelligible apart from an assumption of some degree of efficacy on the part of national states, is followed by an injunction against paying too much attention to states: “But the state . . . does not have this unity, this individuality, this rigorous functionality, nor, to speak frankly, this importance; maybe, after all, the state is no more than a composite reality and a mythicized abstraction, whose importance is a lot more limited than many of us think.” The two contrasting emphases are brought together in the very next sentence: “Maybe what is really important for our modernity . . . is not so much the *étatisation* of society, as the ‘governmentalization’ of the state.”⁴⁷ The

⁴⁶ M. Anderson, *The American census: A social history* (New Haven, CT, 1988), 85, 33.

⁴⁷ Foucault, “Governmentality,” 103.

“governmentalization of the state” is precisely the way I would characterize the process I intend to chart in the context of the late nineteenth-century United States. But the phrase clearly implies some prior existence of the state, and implies also that the transformation wrought in the state has results that are interesting in some way. Making adequate sense of what occurred requires treating the state as more than merely an “effect.” It requires supplementing nominalism with a more conventional willingness to allow the state provisional stability and efficacy where appropriate. Here my strategy will be to foreground the ambiguity detectable in Foucault’s treatment of the state, and to interpret this ambivalence as an incipient rapprochement with more conventional analyses.

Earlier remarks Foucault made on the state in an interview given during the 1970s suggest that the ambivalence is not specific only to his work on governmentality:

I don’t want to say that the State isn’t important; what I want to say is that relations of power, and hence the analysis that must be made of them, necessarily extend beyond the limits of the State. In two senses: first of all because the State, for all the omnipotence of its apparatuses, is far from being able to occupy the whole field of actual power relations, and further, because the State can only operate on the basis of other, already existing power relations. The State is superstructural in relation to a whole series of power networks that invest the body, sexuality, the family, kinship, knowledge, technology and so forth. True, these networks stand in a conditioning-conditioned relationship to a kind of ‘meta-power’ which is structured essentially round a certain number of great prohibition functions; but this meta-power can only take hold and secure its footing where it is rooted in a whole series of multiple and indefinite power relations that supply the necessary basis for the great negative forms of power.⁴⁸

The rhetoric of “negativity” signals that at this stage, Foucault had not yet formulated a clear idea of governmentality, but in so far as his view of the “valence” of the state would change, it would only become easier in principle to justify an analytical interest in the state as an effective agent. The state as a purely coercive power is not necessarily of much analytical interest, but a concept of the state which incorporates governmentality would greatly complicate (and hence render far more interesting) the question of the effects of state activity. The most important thing to note in this passage is the hesitant acknowledgment of a “conditioning-conditioned relationship” between structures of “meta-power” and the micro-power relations that invest them. This suggests that it is possible to view the relation between nominalistic contingency and provisional stability in a dialectical fashion.

To sum up my contention, Foucault implicitly accepted the idea that a social constructionism which fails to take into account the (at least transient) solid-

⁴⁸ M. Foucault, “Truth and power,” in C. Gordon, ed., *Power/Knowledge: Selected interviews and other writings, 1972–1977* (New York 1980), 122.

ity of the products of social construction tells only half the story. He was not so interested in telling the more conventional half of the story, but he knew that there was some point in telling it. The state is derivative, not clearly bounded, internally fragmented and enjoys at best intermittent autonomy; but this “relative autonomy” is not utterly insignificant, and has arguably become more significant during the past century in many parts of the world.

Critical state theory offers a number of insights which come very close to a Foucauldian view in emphasizing the derivativeness, internal fragmentation and ambiguous boundaries of states.⁴⁹ But state theory has the great advantage of being better equipped to recognize and incorporate (rather than merely acknowledge in principle) inertia, solidity, and causal efficacy, whenever the processes through which states are constituted and reconstituted bring such characteristics into being. To make use of state theory is not automatically to surrender to an essentialist, monolithic view of the state. Bob Jessop’s “strategic-relational” approach to state theory is particularly well suited to the rapprochement I would like to achieve here. This approach characterizes the state as a “form-determined condensation of the balance of political forces,” which is to say that although the interests and programs animating state activity are largely of external (“social”) origin, the state structures that have been left behind by previously important interests have a certain inertia to them, and thus end up inflecting (or in some cases deflecting) the projects mediated through them. State forms are constantly changing, too, but are not as liquid as the programs being pursued through them, and thus they exercise an unintentional “strategic selectivity” with regard to these programs. Therefore, “state forms have significant effects on the calculation of political interests and strategies and thus on the composition and dynamic of political forces. These forces may well attempt to use the state but neither they, nor it, can be seen as neutral transmission belts of interests which are fully determined elsewhere in society.”⁵⁰

In an interesting attempt to get to the bottom of, and then get beyond the seeming incompatibility between Foucauldian nominalism and Poulantzas’s relational state theory, Jessop offers a provisional solution to the basic issue which seems eminently wise: “the diversity of micro-social relations is not without its own limits. For, although individual relations or institutions can be considered in isolation as polyvalent elements without any fixity, they are typically integrated into longer chains and systems of elements which restrict their fluidity and lability.”⁵¹ “The state” is an intelligible term for one such chain. As a “form determined condensation of the balance of political forces,” it dialectically exercises “strategic selectivity” as a mediator of the discourses and practices flowing through it. The Gilded Age American state as a context

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 57, 61; B. Jessop, *State theory: Putting capitalist states in their place* (University Park, PA, 1990), ch. 12. ⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 149. ⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 242.

for early “governmentalization” can be characterized in these terms without significant loss of subtlety.

As long as the derivativeness of the general features of the state is kept in view, these features can help set the stage for the story told in the remainder of this study. By most measures (budget relative to size of the American economy, number of personnel relative to size of population or territory), the American federal state by the late 1870s was unusually weak and small as compared with the national states of other industrializing countries.⁵² During and immediately after the Civil War, both the Union and the Confederate states had undergone vast expansions and strengthening of their powers to rule. The Union state, which was essentially an instrument of the Republican Party, arrogated to itself the means to enforce loyalty; used tariffs to protect indigenous industry; put the Union’s financial system on a national footing in order to fund the war (through suspension of convertibility, the issuing of greenbacks, the cooptation of the nation’s banks into a national system, and the creation of a major market in government securities); imposed drastic changes in property relations and citizenship through emancipation of slaves; established military rule and other aspects of reconstruction in the South; pursued territorial settlement through the homesteading program; and created a large class of stakeholders through the payment of veterans’ pensions.⁵³

By the end of Reconstruction, much of this leviathan had been dismantled (the veterans’ pensions being the most interesting exception from a “governmentality” perspective), despite the hopes of a few that the Civil War had ushered in a new age of expanded state activity.⁵⁴ The reasons are complex, but a partial list would include the lack of a strong constituency for reconstruction other than southern blacks, the return of a two-party dynamic in Congress and sustained pressure from finance capitalists for retrenchment of government activity according to the principle of *laissez-faire*.⁵⁵ In addition to pensions, the chief material activities through which the state still made itself felt in national life after 1877 fell under three headings: (1) the fostering of national economic integration through the postal service, support for railroad construction and the system of tariffs; (2) the extraction of revenue through taxation of alcohol, tobacco and imports, which gave the federal state a noticeable presence in ports and commercial centers; and (3) military-led pacification of Indians and internal development and territorial expansion on the western frontier.⁵⁶ But scholars argue that these were modest measures, com-

⁵² Mann, *Sources of social power*, vol. II, ch. 11.

⁵³ R. Bense, *Yankee leviathan: The origins of central state authority in America, 1859–1877* (New York, 1990); T. Skocpol, *Protecting mothers and soldiers: The political origins of social policy in the United States* (Cambridge, MA, 1992), 63–151.

⁵⁴ Skocpol, *Protecting mothers and soldiers*; M. Keller, *Affairs of state: Public life in late nineteenth century America* (Cambridge, MA, 1977), 123.

⁵⁵ Keller, *Affairs of state*, 181; Bense, *Yankee leviathan*.

⁵⁶ Bense, *Yankee leviathan*, 400–402.

pared with the activities of European states. Overall, the American federal government had, according to Stephen Skowronek, returned to a mode of existence best understood as a “state of courts and parties.”⁵⁷ Its structures had undergone shrinkage, and had once again become little more than institutional arenas for the relatively direct expression of competing party, sectional and other interests, all mediated through an active judiciary instead of large, stable executive bureaucracies. The patronage system, which Skowronek identifies as the most important single obstacle to the expansion of administrative capacity, once again animated the administrative apparatus and absorbed much of the time and energy of higher-level officials (see Chapter 2). Richard Bensele argues that it was only when the two major parties reached political parity after 1877 that the fledgling bureaucracies began to have opportunities to insulate themselves to some degree.⁵⁸ Once the Democrats could vie for real political dominance, the threat of faction within the Republican Party became a strong motivation for acquiescence to the demands of the Civil Service Reform movement.⁵⁹ Skowronek notes that as control of the executive began to see-saw between the two parties, it began to make sense for lame-duck presidents to secure their own appointees by expanding the list of Civil Service protected positions just before surrendering the administration to the opposing party.⁶⁰ Morton Keller stresses also the inhibiting effects of the localistic bias of American political sentiments and structures, most importantly, the constitutional principle of “devolution of powers,” whereby all powers not specifically delegated to the federal government are the preserve of state and local governments.⁶¹

The only senses in which something like “governmentality” could be said to exist were in the system of pensions (since it created client relationships and mutual interests between the state and a large sub-group of the population), and in the judicial commitment to defend and strengthen the freedom of the internal market (though *laissez-faire* did not constitute a complete and sufficient governmental program in the eyes of any group other than domestic industrial and commercial interests). Governmentality in the narrower sense which I give it (see above) remained largely latent. The census was taken every ten years, but although it was beginning to be seen as a potential tool for national regulation, its administration was not immune from patronage. Furthermore, no permanent office yet existed to begin to give it some bureaucratic insulation from partisan politics. Other centers for the generation of national statistics were few, and no more advanced than the census in most respects. The “governmentalization of the state” in this context would involve

⁵⁷ S. Skowronek, *Building a new American state: The expansion of national administrative capacities, 1877–1920* (New York, 1982), 15. ⁵⁸ Bensele, *Yankee leviathan*, 3.

⁵⁹ B. Silberman, *Cages of reason: The rise of the rational state in France, Japan, the United States and Great Britain* (Chicago, 1993), 256–259.

⁶⁰ Skowronek, *Building a new American state*, 47–84. ⁶¹ Keller, *Affairs of state*.

very specific programs: (1) the push for collection of more and better statistics; (2) the push to give these statistics a larger role in governmental decisionmaking; (3) the increasing involvement of social scientists in this decision-making; and (4) the establishment of institutional arrangements conducive to the pursuit of the first three goals. The most visible specific policy initiatives that represented incipient governmentalization of the late nineteenth-century American federal state were the push for an expanded census and a permanent Census Office, championed most effectively by Francis A. Walker; the establishment of the Bureau of Labor Statistics under Carroll D. Wright in 1885; certain aspects of the Civil Service reform movement; and the beginnings of regularized consultations between policy-makers and social scientists. All of these campaigns were embedded within a more extensive and diffuse discursive formation just taking shape at that time, and cannot be understood apart from it.

One of the basic claims I would like to make in this study is that “governmentality” is an analytically helpful concept, that it explains phenomena not so well explained by other approaches. Thus, I need to be as explicit as possible about its advantages, not only in relation to more abstract “isms” such as Marxist state theory (see above), but also in relation to more concrete perspectives taken in historical analyses of late nineteenth-century American state formation. The work of Skowronek, Bensel, Keller and others has been immensely fruitful, enriching and complicating the picture we have of the Gilded Age federal state. But despite the gains made, political histories of the period continue to miss governmentality, and thereby to miss some subtle features of the political culture. Although there is considerable variety in the work of these authors, it is fair to say that they have tended to focus more on measurable state power (“administrative capacity”) than on philosophies or programs of government. This focus can be understood as a corrective to more traditional political histories, which tended to construct a two-stage sequence beginning with the Gilded Age (dominated by a *laissez-faire* philosophy) and moving rather quickly around the turn of the century to the Progressive Era (characterized by a sudden willingness to regulate economic activity). The great advantage of the notion of administrative capacity is that it shifts the question to the realm of what was actually there, institutionally speaking, in the way of state power. Most importantly, recent research has revealed considerable levels of state activity well before the Progressive Era, drawing attention particularly to the post-Civil War decade as a time of experiments in heightened federal power.⁶²

Yet two features of this work tend to obscure the emergence of governmentality as a distinctive and potentially important logic. The first is the conviction that partisan politics severely circumscribed the sorts of reform efforts

⁶² See in particular, Bensel, *Yankee leviathan*.