Beyond the Panopticon: Victorian Britain and the Critical Imagination

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AS CHARACTERIZED IN REPRESENTATIVE WORKS SUCH AS *The New Historicism* (1989 [Veseer]), critics working under that rubric proposed an innovative approach to the study of literature and its contexts. Michel Foucault's genealogical methods, boldly exemplified in *Discipline and Punish*, were central to this enterprise. Rigorously antiessentialist, genealogical criticism would historicize the multifaceted operations of power, concentrated in neither potent individuals, hegemonic classes, dominant ideologies, nor institutional apparatuses.[1] Since the appearance of Foucault's book, scholars have creatively applied this mandate to the study of nineteenth-century British literature and culture, producing a far-reaching reimagining of their history. Yet the focus on *Discipline and Punish*, including Foucault's influential account of "panopticism," has sometimes skewed critical work on the Victorian past and, as a result, inhibited our understanding of present-day questions of governance. In this essay, I hope to stimulate thinking about Foucault's complex legacy and to demonstrate the need to move, as Foucault did, beyond the groundbreaking work of the 1970s.

Victorian Britain was, by and large, a self-consciously "liberal" culture,[2] loudly committed to fostering moral and spiritual growth (especially among the educated elite), but, at the same time, suspicious of government interference with individuals and their property. So ambivalent a creed could not but engender contradiction and debate, for in liberal thought, freedom paradoxically signifies "the antonym, the limit *and* the objective" of governance (Barry, Osborne, and Rose 2). There was—and there remains—a tension in liberalism between *negative* liberty (the doctrine of nonintervention) and *positive* liberty (the contrary imperative to empower, which slowly gained ground during the nineteenth century).

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Samuel Smiles's best-selling *Self-Help* (1859) opened by affirming the first principle. The "function of Government," Smiles declared, "is negative and restrictive": to protect property rather than to promote virtue among citizens (2). Yet the positive impulse to develop individuals and encourage social betterment by collective means of some kind permeated a variety of reformist discourses, including Victorian literature. Self-consciously progressive authors such as Charles Dickens, Elizabeth Gaskell, and H. G. Wells turned imaginative writing into the site of a distinctive liberal quandary. Their paradoxical task—like that of their philosophical contemporary John Stuart Mill—was to envision a modern governing agency that would be rational, all-embracing, and effective but also antibureaucratic, personalized, and liberatory.

For these reasons, Foucault's later works on governmentality, which were written in response to the resurgence of liberal economic ideologies in the 1980s, provide a more fruitful basis for visualizing Britain's idiosyncratic modernization than does *Discipline and Punish*. In particular, the concept of *pastorship*, which describes innovations in governance both inside and outside a centralized state bureaucracy, is helpful in evoking the disciplinary formations of a society imagined in expressly liberal terms. Indeed, now that the modern welfare state has become an object of sustained neoliberal critique, a more nuanced analysis of the Victorian past may benefit present-day debates.

Nineteenth-Century British Governance

It is a commonplace of many social histories that British governance differed from that of most Continental countries: Britain's centralized state was smaller, less intrusive, and more reliant on local and voluntary supports but—for all that—highly effective in maintaining social stability at home and exploiting colonial interests abroad.[3] The Victorians saw this governing structure as the hallmark of an exceptional liberal heritage encompassing Puritan dissent, the Lockean notion of the sovereign individual, the myth of pre-Norman Anglo-Saxon liberty, the politico-economic doctrine of laissez-faire, and, in the nineteenth century, aspects of the Romantic movement, including German philosophical influences. Invoking this legacy, the Victorians imagined themselves as citizens of a self-governing nation and heirs to ancient constitutional liberties. By custom, by nature—even by divine will—Britons were, it was believed, a vanguard people, able to contrast their freedoms to the noxious state interference endured by Continental and Oriental peoples (Colley; Goodlad, "'Middle Class'").

It is, therefore, also a commonplace that the Victorian state expanded in response to the urgent social pressures of urbanization and industrialization—its piecemeal development unaided by popular consensus or a consistent philosophical agenda. Centralizing measures such as the 1834 New Poor Law and the 1848 Public Health Act were widely disliked. "Self-government"—as contemporaries liked to style their preference for local control, civic voluntarism, personalized philanthropy, and individual self-help—was seen as "a quintessential feature of British national character" (Harris, *Private Lives* 18). Direct government interference "was something [the Victorians] hardly knew and did not like the idea of" (Best 251). In the early 1850s, Edwin Chadwick's Bentham-influenced sanitary ideas so antagonized mainstream opinion that they precipitated a lasting backlash. Not until the fin de siècle collectivism of the Fabians did Jeremy Bentham's legacy enjoy a significant resurgence.[4]

In *Constitutional Bureaucracy* (1969), Henry Parris attributed a much greater role to Bentham, arguing that his influential thought triggered the so-called nineteenth-century revolution in government. On the whole, however, Parris's thesis has had less sway among historians than Oliver MacDonagh's "pragmatic" model. For MacDonagh, the gradual centralization, rationalization, and expansion of the Victorian state began as a response to social crisis and continued through

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the self-generated momentum of administrators themselves. With the mid-century decline of Benthamism, Chartism, and other radical challenges to the status quo, liberal ideas flourished in the fabled equipoise of the mid-Victorian constitutional consensus. The ideal of disinterested governance, first articulated by civic-republican-minded Whigs, effloresced in the vintage liberalism of the Gladstone era. An all-embracing moral philosophy as well as a political agenda, mid-Victorian liberalism trumpeted the progressive benefits of free trade and low taxation, individual and community self-reliance, parliamentary representation for the propertied, and a civil service staffed by well-bred gentlemen. Liberal governance in this conservative British form withstood many pressures, including the adult male franchise, holding its ground until the unprecedented exigencies of the First World War.

There is, to be sure, much evidence to support Mary Poovey's claim that the Benthamite-influenced reforms of the 1830s constituted the epistemological foundations of "the professionalized, bureaucratized apparatuses of inspection, regulation, and enforcement that we call the modern state" (115–16). Yet even the cornerstone of those reforms—the landmark 1834 New Poor Law—was, for all its centralizing features, an attempt to strengthen local government, abolish the largesse of the Old Poor Law, and institute laissez-faire. In the words of its framers, the act was "intended to produce rather negative than positive effects": to deter pauperism rather than to treat it (qtd. in Loch 238–39). In the 1890s, as Britain's global preeminence began visibly to decline, a vocal minority demanded a shift from "laissez faire" to "savoir faire" (qtd. in Searle 97). Reforming the poor laws became the primary object of the Fabians, who sought to improve national efficiency by establishing a multipronged state that would prevent and cure. Wells, the author of numerous Fabianesque works of fiction, lamented the ignorant "distrust" that kept the British from permitting "the State" to govern "in a business-like way" (17). From such a view, late Victorian and Edwardian Britain profoundly lacked the modern statist rationality described in Poovey's account.

Victorian liberals were also zealous enthusiasts of parliamentary commissions of inquiry. Such putatively objective fact-gathering bodies were invaluable to a government that promised firm but constitutional responses to a wide range of problems. Yet while Blue Books and the legislative redress that sometimes followed them exemplified a recognizably bureaucratic approach to governing the new social domain, it is important to distinguish between these developments and the intrusive state apparatuses described by Foucault in *Discipline and Punish*. In Britain statutory innovations such as the introduction of policing were, throughout the century, ridden with "delay, compromise and half measure" (Gatrell 257). Centralized inspection was hampered—as in the case of the New Poor Law—by the insufficiency of resources and the lack of meaningful coercive power. Diminutive staffs (between ten and twenty officials to inspect the nation's multifarious workhouses) necessarily meant that much was left to "local discretion" (Fraser 53; cf. Wood 79–83). Enterprising officials like Sir James Kay-Shuttleworth, a pioneer in working-class education, had "limited freedom of action" with which to implement their grand designs (Paz 168–69).[5] These and many similar accounts support Derek Fraser's claim that any history of the nineteenth century "which does not emphasise the practical, pragmatic, unplanned, *ad hoc* response of the state is in a major respect deficient" (117).

It is also important to recognize that many Victorian civil servants were themselves staunch liberals who used their official positions to forward laissez-faire social policies. The upper-class members of the 1858–61 Newcastle Commission, for example, sought to delimit working-class education in the interests of self-help and economy. There was, in their words, "a material difference . . . between the political and social circumstances of [Britain] . . . and those of countries

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where the central administration wields great power over a people . . . habituated to the control of a searching police, and subjected to the direct action of the government" (qtd. in Best 251). To preserve that "material difference," Robert Lowe, vice president of the Education Department, sought to reverse the gains of reformers such as Kay-Shuttleworth. In 1842 Samuel Laing, a middle-class radical, had argued that the Continental man was an "educated slave," "his personal bodily and mental actions . . . fitted on him by his master, the state, like clothing on a convict" (495–96). It is surely significant that almost twenty years later, the conservative-leaning liberals on the Newcastle Commission invoked a similar rhetoric to justify a policy of retrenchment. The adoption of market forces, Lowe believed, would ensure that such schooling as was provided at government expense would be, if not necessarily efficient, then at least "cheap" (Fraser 85). Since so-called disinterested government was less loath to punish crime than to foster education, "it was . . . in its policeman guise rather than in its paternalistic guise that the Victorian state" first demonstrated "its power and purposes" (Gatrell 259).

The other side of the limited scope of the Victorian state was the formidable voluntarism of the Victorians themselves. Throughout the century and beyond, "most of the functions performed by government in other societies were . . . performed by coteries of citizens governing themselves." The multiplicity of charities and self-help organizations created a "dense network of self-governing social institutions that encircled the citizen at every level." As late as 1911, the receipts of registered philanthropies exceeded the state's expenditures on the poor law (Harris, "Society" 68; cf. Prochaska 384–85 and Behlmer 34). Proponents of organized charity sought to annex the state's negative functions to a permanent corps of well-trained volunteers. In so doing, they pioneered modern social work. From this view, Mrs. Pardiggle, the infamous busybody of Dickens's *Bleak House*, was in actuality a harbinger of the future, representative of an increasingly authoritative and professionalized social practice.

Britain's idiosyncratic modernization has been noticed by critics as diverse as Alexis de Tocqueville, Karl Marx, G. M. Young, Antonio Gramsci, Max Weber, Charles Taylor, and, as we shall see, Michel Foucault.[6] Weber, in particular, referred continually to the interesting sociological fact that England, the first nation to develop modern capitalism, was also "the slowest of all countries to succumb to bureaucratization." Indeed, England was still, to Weber's mind (c. 1914), "only partly in the process of doing so" (*From Max Weber* 228). For all these reasons, *Discipline and Punish*, written from a 1970s presentist perspective, with French contexts foremost in mind, is a distorting lens through which to peer at the disciplinarization of Britain's idiosyncratic, self-consciously liberal, relatively decentralized, and "self-governing" society.

Whose Panopticon?

According to the author of *Discipline and Punish*, Bentham "laid down the principle that power should be visible and unverifiable." The particular genius of Bentham's design is that power can be both at once, for the inmate of the Panopticon "must never know whether he is being looked at at any one moment; but . . . must be sure that he may always be so." In this way the Panopticon "automatizes and disindividualizes" power (201–02): panoptical power inheres in the machine, regardless of who operates it.

The implication is that Bentham, having imagined the perfect machinery for power's exercise, sought to invest power wholly in machinery. Who would run the Panopticon? Foucault rightly emphasizes that the question is irrelevant to the technical functioning of Bentham's machine: but he misleadingly suggests that the question was also irrelevant to Bentham. Whereas Foucault imagines the Panopticon as a model of society as a whole, Bentham defined it

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as a "principle of construction"—integral but subordinate to society at large. Indeed, society's most critical function was to superintend those to whom it delegated panoptical power: for Bentham recognized in his invention not only "a new mode of obtaining power of mind over mind, in a quantity hitherto without example," but also a device that must be "*equally* . . . secured . . . against abuse" (40; cf. Blake 3–4).

Thus, from Bentham's utilitarian perspective—unlike Foucault's genealogical perspective—the exercise of power was itself secondary to the substantive individual and social aims on behalf of which power was exercised. Crucial to Bentham's political economy, for example, was that the machine be remunerative as well as disciplinary. In fact, Bentham envisioned the Panopticon as a privately run enterprise, not a public institution: "I would farm out the profits, the no-profits, or if you please the losses, to him who, being in other respects unexceptionable, offered the best terms" (47). Because the genealogist is indifferent to such contexts, he risks overlooking the effects they impose on the inspection principle. Hence, Foucault notices Bentham's stipulation that "the persons to be inspected should always feel themselves as if under inspection," but he virtually ignores its supplement: "What is also of importance is, that for the greatest proportion of time possible, each man should actually *be* under inspection" so that "the inspector may have the satisfaction of knowing, that the discipline actually has the effect which it is designed to have" and so that he can supervise "such transient and incidental directions as will require to be given and enforced, at the commencement at least of every course of industry" (44). Clearly, such "design[s]" and "directions" as are necessary to running a profitable business mitigate the automatization and disindividualization of disciplinary power—neither of which was itself a priority for Bentham. Tellingly, Bentham envisioned himself as the governor of the first panoptical prison (Himmelfarb 58–63). Throughout his text he stressed the need to exercise caution in the vesting of power. Such admonitions cast doubt on the depersonalization so central to Foucault's genealogical analysis.

Bentham's plan also included machinery to protect the panoptical institution against the "abuse" of the governor: superintendents whose monitoring functions would be both abetted and superintended by the public—"the great *open committee* of the tribunal of the world" (46). Foucault acknowledges that the Panopticon itself is thus "subjected to . . . inspections" and "democratically controlled"—that it is, in effect, a "transparent building in which the exercise of power may be supervised by society as a whole" (207). Inexplicably, however, Foucault notices these important stipulations only to conflate the subject position of the unseen observer with that of the sightless observed. The prototype of Foucault's "disciplinary individual" is always the inmate—the object of panopticism's "faceless gaze"—never the observer in the central tower (227, 214). Following Julius, the nineteenth-century penologist who provided the "birth certificate" for modern French discipline, Foucault argues that the Panopticon replaced ancient spectacle with modern surveillance (216–17). It would, perhaps, be more accurate to say that Bentham's inspection house sought to open surveillance to the spectatorship of the modern world.

For Bentham, then, at least two subject positions characterize a post-Panopticon society: not only the inmate in the cell but also the vigilant citizen-observer in the tower. Such preconceived asymmetries are difficult to historicize in the absence of materialist concepts (e.g., class) that help to explain why certain populations appear destined to take their places as citizens and others as delinquents. Indeed, from this perspective, the Panopticon is the epitome of class society in the making, not a suitable structure for an antiessentialist analysis of power. As Jenny Sharpe has argued, the notion of "an omnifunctional, free-floating power breaks down any distinction between relations of domination and subordination" (9). If the invention of the profit-making

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Panopticon teaches us anything, it is that power, however ubiquitous, does not circulate equally.

Bentham's late-eighteenth-century "idea in architecture" was but a prelude to a far more ambitious design: the massive *Constitutional Code* (1830). In this little-remembered opus, Bentham produced a blueprint for a totalizing *raison d'état*. What Bentham called the *Pannomion* was a complete code of directive laws to be enacted and overseen by an "omnicompetent" legislature who, in turn, were the elected representatives of a sovereign people. John Stuart Mill saw the genius of the *Code* in its "devising means for preventing rulers from escaping from the control of the majority" ("Bentham" 165). For Mill, whose distinctive liberal instinct was to hallow individuality, the majority was itself the most likely abuser of disciplinary power in a modern society. This crucial insight was alien to Bentham's rigorously formalist mentality.

Still, it is worth clarifying that the thrust of Bentham's dream was not, as readers of Foucault might imagine, to subject society to the faceless surveillance of the state. Like his Fabian heirs, Bentham endowed government with a strong positive function, a "tutelary" purpose harking back to the Hobbesian idea that human interests must be artificially harmonized. Yet Bentham envisioned the *Code* as an open-ended system through which to secure simultaneously the deployment, legitimization, *and* oversight of disciplinary power (Hume, "Jeremy Bentham" 365–70 and *Bentham* 5–6). In Bentham's scheme the citizen (however implausibly) was empowered both to enact and to inspect the instruments of his own tutelage. Isolated subjection, like that of the inmate of the Panopticon, was reserved for a small minority of incurable delinquents.

In spirit, then, Bentham's was not precisely the dream of a bureaucratic utopia presided over by benevolent administrators—not the dream, in other words, of Chadwick and, decades later, the Fabians. Bentham's vision, a reaction to the abuses of the ancien régime, is perhaps best understood as a call for accountability: functionally democratic and profoundly skeptical about the human capacity to exercise power without abusing it. "Jealousy, not confidence," Bentham wrote, with the potential mismanagement of the Panopticon in mind, "is the characteristic of wise laws" (qtd. in Himmelfarb 42). Hence, the "visib[ility]" of power was crucial to Bentham's philosophy of government, but its "unverifiab[ility]" related only to one subordinate component of the master machine. Foucault's genealogy recognizes Bentham's invention as a mechanism of power but sets aside the substantive aims on behalf of which that power was—in theory—to be mobilized.[7]

In a famous passage in *Discipline and Punish,* Foucault describes the plague-stricken city of seventeenth-century France: an "enclosed, segmented space, observed at every point, in which . . . power is exercised without division" (197–98). Clearly, Foucault saw Bentham's Panopticon as a "generalizable model" of this hitherto "exceptional" mobilization of power (205)—a "formula" for the efficient and continuous deployment of discipline (209). Crucial to his antiessentialist premise, however, is the move away from the Panopticon—the material prison—and toward panopticism, a "movement" wherein disciplinary technologies exceed their institutional boundaries and "stretch" to "an indefinitely generalizable mechanism" (216; cf. 209). Indeed, without this generalizing motion, Foucault's account of the Panopticon becomes, in effect, the kind of flawed Marxist analysis he seeks to avoid: an Althusserian-like theory in which reified "Ideological State Apparatuses" (such as the Panopticon) directly dominate through subject constitution (Althusser, esp. 162–74). Thus, the shift from "exceptional discipline" to "generalized surveillance" (209) enables Foucault to specify that discipline should not be identified with institutions but should be understood instead as "a type of power" and "a modality for [power's] exercise" (215).

For the post-Foucauldian critic, at least one searching question arises: how can the genealogist account for "a historical transformation" of

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this kind when his analysis focuses on the effects of already existing power relations (209)? By excluding substantive and linguistic concepts such as culture, ideology, values, and norms, Foucault is unable to explain how (much less why) certain struggles and their outcomes become consolidated and institutionalized (Habermas 287). Foucault defuses this problem only by invoking the material details of French history. Early modern France saw the "swarming" of both exceptional institutions and their generalized offshoots, while the "*state-control of the mechanisms of discipline*" increased under successive absolutist, revolutionary, and Napoleonic regimes (211, 213). With the exception of the Panopticon, Foucault draws largely on these Continental developments. He is far less interested in Britain, where a self-consciously liberal and vehemently Protestant national culture helped to ensure that the growth of centralized, modern institutions remained subject to deep-seated popular hostility.

That is not to deny the formidable achievements of British administrative pioneers such as Chadwick and Kay-Shuttleworth. Nor is it to minimize the effects of bureaucratic experimentation in the colonies.[8] Nor is it to overlook the fact that over the course of the nineteenth century (and especially after 1870) the rationalization, centralization, and expansion of Victorian government proceeded apace. It is, however, to suggest that inasmuch as so astute a civil servant as Matthew Arnold was prompted to declare, in 1869, that the British people "have not the notion, so familiar on the Continent . . . , of *the State*" (83–84), the application of Foucault's genealogy to Victorian Britain appears to present at least one logical problem. Can a model in which panopticism is both "generalized" from and concentrated in exemplary modern institutions be applied successfully to the study of a society in which such institutions were only beginning to evolve? Clearly, Victorianist scholars seeking to account for the generalization of panopticism must either modify Foucault's analysis or conflate Britain's material history with that of France.

Governmentality

Fortunately, Foucault himself provides important resources for the critical imagining of the Victorian past. His late thinking on governmentality clearly aims to offer alternatives to the objectifying domination and statist emphases of *Discipline and Punish*, thereby illuminating the study of discipline in a self-consciously liberal society.[9] First, Foucault dramatically improves on genealogy's impoverished model of human subjectivity. In contrast to the dominated bodies of *Discipline and Punish*, governmentality presumes active subjects who are both conscious and "free."[10] By excepting relations of physical force, Foucault redefines power as that which is exercised over agents for whom choice is possible: "subjects who are faced with a field of possibilities in which several ways of behaving . . . may be realized" ("Subject" 221). Foucault's revised subject is therefore theoretically compatible with materialist concepts such as Pierre Bourdieu's notion of the *habitus*. For Bourdieu, subject constitution entails the profound acculturation of mind and body, a process through which conscious individuals become unconsciously complicit in perpetuating cultural norms. Normativization works through the deployment of "symbolic power"—a power that, like Foucault's, is distinct from physical force. While the notion of subjectivities habituated through the circulation of symbolic power is hardly liberatory, it does, like Foucault's revised position, endow individuals with the potential to resist norms.

According to Foucault's later essays, power operates indirectly, through the mediation of human actors engaged in diverse relations with one another ("Subject" 225). Power relations thus consist in modes of action upon the actions of others. Freedom and power agonistically provoke each other, each representing the precondition of the other's possibility. To be free is not—as in crude liberal thought—to escape to some autonomous realm outside power but, rather, to exercise one's own power to influence and be influenced by others. Foucault's revisions

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thus constitute a relational theory of power, predicated on perpetual contest and on the possibility of change.[11]

Foucault's revisions further demand a reimagining of the state. Whereas *Discipline and Punish* persistently returned to the importance of state apparatuses, "Governmentality" asks us to reconsider precisely this tendency. The state, Foucault argues, is but "a mythicized abstraction" of power. Rather than reify state domination, scholars must discover the extent to which the state itself depends on external relations of power (103). In thus locating power largely outside of the state's aegis, governmentality anticipates Foucault's vivid articulation of liberalism as a critique of *raison d'état*: as the "moment it became apparent that if one governed too much, one did not govern at all" ("Space" 242; cf. Gordon 15).

It would be hard to overstate the relevance of such thinking to the critical imagining of nineteenth-century Britain. Throughout the century, Britain's ruling classes strove to govern indirectly: to implement parliamentary power in ways that encouraged self-help, philanthropy, civic voluntarism, and local government. In the 1830s the British electorate cautiously affirmed the state's mandate to maintain social stability. The parliamentary reforms of this era authorized the state to promote brutally deterrent poor laws and efficient policing but not to administer or, indeed, to compel such measures. In this process, the purpose of the nation's legendarily "free" constitution was reimagined: emphasis shifted away from the historical protection of "natural" rights (i.e., the rights of the landed elite to curb the state's potential tyranny) and toward the protection of property (toward which end the state might play a useful role).[12] This was a foundational moment in what Weber has described as the intimate relation between capitalism and the rationalization of the social order (*Law* 350; *Economy and Society* 1465n14). Nevertheless, in securing the stability on which capitalist development depended, Britain's leaders—as Weber recognized—resisted or curtailed unpopular statist measures. Their goal was not "regular bureaucratic intervention" but the liberal ideal of a "moralistic but pluralistic self-governing order" (Parry 127). As a mentality of rule, explains Nikolas Rose, liberalism abandoned the "megalomaniac and obsessive fantasy of a totally administered society" (43). Whig arts of government perfectly illustrate liberalism in this form: their aim was precisely to regulate "the general conduct of individuals . . . without the need for intervention" (Foucault, "Space" 241).

Indeed, according to Whig-Liberal ideology, intervention was invariably counterproductive. As George Cornewall Lewis, a leading Whig, asserted in 1832, "All the praiseworthy endeavours of rulers to make men good by law have utterly failed" (qtd. in Mandler 90). Addressing Parliament in 1840, Henry Howick epitomized the Whig philosophy of governance. In addition to protecting person and property, he argued, government may "promote," "diffuse," and "encourage" the "virtue" of citizens. But it cannot attempt to enforce or—as in Bentham—to mechanically generate such virtue (qtd. in Parry 114). Harriet Martineau, the celebrated popularizer of political economy, articulated the same idea in her 1837 study *Society in America*: "laws and customs cannot be creative of virtue: they may encourage and help to preserve it; but they cannot originate it." Laws, in other words, may operate negatively (by punishing crime) and indirectly (by "encouraging" virtue). But social improvement ultimately derives from the personal efforts of individuals: by "each one being as good as he can make himself" (244). Victorian Whigs and their allies thus assumed that government could play only a limited role in shaping human character.

Foucault's late works help us to analyze liberalism in this form by calling attention to the covert effects of a laissez-faire ideology that proclaimed its own inactivity. Like Marx and Engels before him, Foucault alerts us to the tension between government's purposely unobtrusive form and its potentially powerful effects.[13] Al-

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though Whigs such as Howick insisted that individual virtue "alone" creates prosperity, they called on the state to protect property, "assuring to exertion its true reward" (qtd. in Parry 114). In so doing, the state undertook to steady Adam Smith's invisible hand. Whig-Liberal governance was thus demonstrably unlike the disciplinary society of Foucault's genealogy. Nonetheless, the power to exercise force curtailed political and criminal dissidence, while exploiting colonial resources, thus warranting the "consensus" on which liberal societies depend.[14]

Yet what interested Foucault more than the state's power to repress were the more subtle, diffuse, and productive processes of "governmentalization." In these essays, he evoked an intricate play of indirect power relations, both inside and outside the state, that "incite," "seduce," "make easier or more difficult"—a power that, unlike statist repression, is "a way of acting upon . . . acting subjects by virtue of their acting or being capable of action" ("Subject" 220). Foucault's notion of empowered actors provoking one another through a dense web of indirect relations provides a fitting model for what the Victorians saw as a dynamic public sphere. A "free intellectual community," wrote Walter Bagehot in 1856, "is a complicated network of ramified relations, interlacing and passing hither and thither, old and new." For Bagehot, the relation between civil society and the state was, like Foucault's relation between freedom and power, agonistic rather than antithetical, each constituting the conditions of the other's possibility (254–57). Bagehot thus articulated a characteristically mid-Victorian equipoise between the energy of "free" individuals and the duty of statesmen to provide rationalizing influence.

From Disciplinary Individualism to Pastorship

The hardest lesson for Government or urchin to learn is, what it ought not *do. . . . [I]t is not the province of the Government to train the mind of the people. [Government should protect person and property, but it] is* not *the duty of Government to feed the people, to clothe them, to build houses for them, to direct their industry or their commerce, to superintend their families, to cultivate their minds, to shape their opinions, or to supply them with religious teachers, physicians, schoolmasters, books, or newspapers.*

—Edward Baines, *Letters . . . on State Education* (1846 [qtd. in Digby and Searby 88])

I could shape for you other plans, for art-galleries, and for natural history galleries, and for many precious, many, it seems to me, needful things. . . . [O]ur British constitution . . . wants healthier feeding. You have got its corn laws repealed for it; try if you cannot get corn laws established for it, dealing in a better bread;—bread made of that old enchanted Arabian grain, the Sesame, which opens doors;—doors, not of robbers', but of Kings' Treasuries.

—John Ruskin, *Sesame and Lilies* (1864 [47])

In *Discipline and Punish*, "disciplinary individualism" described the central paradox of the modern condition. According to Foucault, the more one was monitored and assessed, the "stronger" one's "individuality" became (193). The chief problem with this important concept was its inability to distinguish between the dominatory power of state apparatuses and the kind of everyday socializing processes emphasized in Bourdieu's theory of the *habitus*. As Edward Said has argued, Foucault confused "the power of institutions to subjugate individuals" with the simple fact "that individual behaviour in society is frequently a matter of following rules and conventions" (151). Theorized in this way, the disciplinary individual "lacks any kind of autonomous identity" and, therefore, any capacity to treat of "substantive ethical or socio-political questions" (Norris 54, 60; cf. Walzer 64 and Eagleton 7–8). Critics influenced by Foucault's analysis of power thus problematize the historicization of self-reflective or critically detached subjectivities (A. Anderson). Genealogy privileges discursive "manipulation" "at the expense of psychic understanding" (Lane 4).

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As though in reply, Foucault's essays on governmentality reconceptualize the paradox of disciplinary individualism by introducing human agency and (in theory) deemphasizing the state. Foucault here identifies the power to individualize with *pastorship*, the ancient Christian concept of the shepherd's intensive care for his flock. From the seventeenth century on, he argues, secularized forms of pastorship sought to strengthen society by maximizing the productive potential of individuals ("Politics" 82, 60). Here is the paradox refigured: the same processes through which modern societies promote well-being entangle the individual in a normativizing web. A prime manifestation of this paradox is the present-day social security system, which, while beneficial to individual welfare, has the "perverse effect" of encouraging dependence on a rule-bound bureaucracy ("Social Security" 160).

Pastorship so defined lends itself to an analysis of various British developments. At the turn of the twentieth century, the "New Liberals" attempted to elude the paradox of state welfare by introducing national insurance financed through workers' contributions. But for most of the Victorian era a more apt articulation of the paradox was the self-reliant individual "encircled . . . at every level" by an elaborate network of "self-governing" social practices (Harris, "Society" 68). At the same time, Britain's leading social critics—including celebrated writers—were convinced that the nation's most serious problem was the lack of pastorship. Pastorship thus provides a powerful tool for the critical imagining of Victorian governance: sufficiently flexible to describe the aims and achievements of both voluntarists and statists, philanthropists and bureaucrats, staunch individualists like Edward Baines and humanitarian critics like John Ruskin.

That said, Foucault's elaboration of pastorship significantly diverges from British contexts. His focus on the Continent leads him back to the multifarious activities of centralized states in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. As Christianity's notion of exhaustive and individualizing pastoral guidance became secularized in postfeudal Europe, it developed through a broad notion of "police": "a governmental technology peculiar to the state; domains, techniques, targets where the state intervenes" ("Politics" 77). Such a state technology, moreover, was continuous with an epistemological shift of sorts: a shift from the model of the family (seen as a microcosm of feudal rule) to the model of population (an abstraction of the masses reified through statistical analyses).

These aspects of Foucault's study of governmentality arguably compromise his determination to avoid overemphasizing the state. Nevertheless, that is of far less consequence in the case of Britain. Indeed, Foucault himself remarked on the difference between early modern French and British governmentalization: "The English," he wrote, "did not develop a comparable ["police"] system, mainly because of the parliamentary tradition on the one hand, and the tradition of local, communal autonomy on the other, not to mention the religious system" ("Space" 241; cf. *Discipline* 213). As Nancy Armstrong has argued, Puritan treatises "represented the family as a self-enclosed social unit in whose affairs the state could not intervene" (18). Hence, while Parliament was, in many respects, a formidable site of centralized power, the development of pastorship in early modern Britain was unlike "the rather typically French effort of policing" (Foucault, "Space" 241).

In the nineteenth century, through the groundbreaking efforts of self-appointed middle-class statisticians such as Nassau Senior and James Kay-Shuttleworth, a modern notion of population—the idea, in Poovey's term, of a "social body"—impressed itself indelibly on the Victorian imagination. The mid–nineteenth century saw a proliferation of royal commissions of inquiry and a zealous "faith in information" and social statistics (O. Anderson 283). But the idea of an abstract population, along with the objectifying materialist stance on which it depends, was relentlessly challenged by powerful rivals for epistemological

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authority. Kay-Shuttleworth himself embodied both sides of these conflicting allegiances: a statistician and protobureaucrat but also a disciple of the power of personalized bonds to revivify a Christian and civic community. Such ambivalence was even more striking in the great social novels of the era. Writers like Gaskell and Dickens dramatized the ills of a pastorless nation but, in so doing, recoiled from statist solutions. Hence, a critical practice that aims to imagine the path of governmentalization in nineteenth-century Britain must distance itself from Foucault's analyses of France and focus on the "specific rationalities" familiar to liberal Victorians.[15]

In early modern France, Foucault alleges, the family "disappear[ed] as the model of government, *except for a certain number of residual themes of a religious or moral nature*" ("Governmentality" 99; emphasis added). These "themes," as readers of Martineau, Gaskell, Carlyle, Dickens, Ruskin, and a host of others will recognize, were—so far from being "residual"—the source of Victorian literature's characteristic frisson. Ruskin's call for "healthier feeding" is but one example from a literature teeming with demands for committed pastorship in a nation of allegedly self-reliant individuals and communities. Such demands took precisely the form of moral and religious imperatives. These were not calls for a more efficient population (although such calls existed and would reach a crescendo at the turn of the century) but pleas on behalf of the shepherdless poor for the reinvigoration of community and character-building ties between upper and lower ranks. Describing the persistence of religious belief in nineteenth-century Britain, Charles Taylor has contrasted the modernization of French and Anglo-Saxon societies. It "would be a mistake," he argues, to regard Britain's liberal reforms "as part of a smooth, continuing, unidirectional move towards 'secularization,' " since the "initial impulse underlying reform was a deeply religious one" (*Sources* 399, 401). Thus, British governmentalization differed from French for at least two reasons: first, because a moral, familial, and religious concept of pastorship persisted in Britain and, second, because, from the view of many influential contemporaries, British pastorship—left to the discretion of voluntary and local efforts—was woefully insufficient.

Hence, for Victorian and Edwardian Britons, pastorship was a vexing contemporary issue: a source of breast-beating moral angst, political controversy, and conflicted social desire. Novels such as Dickens's *Bleak House* represent a distinctively British paradox: on the one hand, figuring the hapless victims of laissez-faire (Jo and the inhabitants of Tom-all-Alone's); on the other hand, rejecting modern pastoral alternatives (Tulkinghorn's ominous professional expertise, Bucket's compromised police power, Mrs. Pardiggle's organized philanthropic endeavors). This is not the Foucauldian paradox of the individual's dependence on external and normalizing forms of authority (a point to which I will return) but the uniquely British paradox of the middle- and upper-class Victorians who demanded effective governance only to be confounded by their own ingrained liberal predilections. Although *Bleak House* vehemently exposes the evils of laissez-faire, it simultaneously rejects Chadwickian technocracy and professionalized social work, instead favoring the personal and familial pastoral relations associated with Esther and Allan Woodcourt. Similarly, Gaskell's *North and South* (1854–55) portrays the ills of unregulated industrial capitalism yet strives to imagine redress in terms of sustained "personal contact" between proprietors and proletarians (421). In this way, Victorian literature represents nothing so persistently as the desire for a catachrestic pastoral authority: one that would be rational but unbureaucratic, personal but omnipresent, authoritative but liberatory, efficient but English.[16]

Mill, Foucault, and the Imagination of Power in a Liberal Society

[W]e can demand of those who govern us a certain truth as to their ultimate aims. . . . [T]his is the

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> parrhesia *(free speech) of the governed, who can and must question those who govern them . . . by virtue of being citizens. . . .*
>
> —Foucault, "Aesthetics" (51)

Like Michel Foucault, John Stuart Mill devoted his life's work to the problem of individuality in modern societies. Although he was raised by James Mill to be Bentham's scion, Mill's careful reading of romantic thinkers such as Tocqueville, Coleridge, and Wilhelm von Humboldt persuaded him that human individuality was the highest social good. Mill became the arch exponent of a principled liberal middle ground. Just as he sought a synthesis between Benthamite and Coleridgean philosophies, so he attempted to cultivate an "art of government" that would simultaneously centralize and diffuse knowledge, producing "the greatest dissemination of power consistent with efficiency" (*Liberty* 164). That said, Mill was as loath as Foucault to believe that liberty could be guaranteed by laws and institutions. His lifelong exhortation to civic participation anticipated Foucault's insight that "liberty is what must be *exercised*" ("Space" 245). Mill's prescient critique of mass society helps us to imagine how a calculable modern rationality developed within a culture that was, to a very large extent, politically, intellectually, and philosophically opposed to that end.

The thesis of Mill's remarkable 1836 essay "Civilization" is that material progress deteriorates character and diminishes individual power. Mill begins by stipulating that modern society is civilized "in the narrow sense": its achievements chiefly material rather than broadly human. Indeed, in point of *cultivation* (a Coleridgean concept), civilization is arguably "stationary" or "retrograde" (119). The reason is simple. Because civilization consists in rudimentary forms of cooperation—division of labor, protection of property, and dependence on other "general arrangements"—individuals need no longer exert their "strength or courage" to survive (129). Thus, in a civilized society, character atrophies as "power passes from individuals to masses," and "the weight and importance" of individuals "sink into greater and greater insignificance" (126).

Mill's thesis not only belies the ubiquitous myth of Britain's stalwart national character, it also derails the searching political and philosophical debates of the day. Mill himself urged a liberal balance between civil and state authority and between local and centralized governance. He also supported a progressive social agenda, including popular education and administrative and democratic reform.[17] Yet, as Mill tells it, these liberalizing measures do not in themselves provide safeguards against the further decline of individuality. Rather, civilization advances through a self-perpetuating dynamic: as the scale and complexity of the "general arrangements" on which individuals depend become ever greater, power passes from individuals to masses. Political forms—for example, local as opposed to centralized government—reverse that dynamic only insofar as they succeed in fortifying individuality.[18]

For Mill, the moral and intellectual consequences of individual disempowerment are devastating. It is in this respect that Mill's thought, for all its gradualism, most closely approximates that of his revolutionary contemporary Karl Marx.[19] With so few "inducements to call forth energy of character," Mill writes, the great majority of people are motivated by nothing but the desire of wealth (129). Such embourgeoisement is vastly amplified by the influence of mass culture. Urban anonymity reduces the significance, even the possibility, of individual repute. Newspapers speak "in the same voice at once," disseminating ideas with the speed of a telegraph and facilitating an all-but-"irresistible" popular will (125). Representation begins visibly to dominate reality: success "depends not upon what a person is, but what he seems" (133). Depersonalization advances—regardless of entrenched resistance to bureaucratic forms—as a function of the sheer scale, pace, and multiplicity of civilized social relations. For Mill modern civilization thus entails what Marx and Engels

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call a systematic "suppression of individuality" (*German Ideology* 464).

Whereas eighteenth-century thinkers such as Bentham had touted the virtues of public opinion, Mill shows that opinion itself has become both a product and an agent of specious value: "The individual becomes so lost in the crowd, that though he depends more and more upon opinion, he is apt to depend less and less on well-grounded opinion" (132). Mill is but a step away from the homogenized masses he drew in *On Liberty* more than twenty years later: ruled by the "despotism of custom," tyrannized by norms, leveled by conformity in education, politics, commerce, and the arts. For Mill civilization thus foments "so great a mass of influences hostile to Individuality, that it is not easy to see how it can stand its ground" (*Liberty* 117, 121).

Mill's ideas for combating these trends illustrate his drift from his father's Benthamite stance. In a general (and important) sense, Mill articulates the germ of positive liberty: the anti-laissez-faireist notion that progress will not develop so long as societies "slumber, and leave things to themselves" ("Civilization" 136). Significantly, however, in "Civilization" Mill's main vision of positive action is to strengthen "the influence of superior minds over the multitude" (135). Mill's Coleridgean interest in producing a tier of intellectual pastors thus anticipates Gladstone's mid-Victorian civil service agenda and Arnold's idea of "Culture": in each of these cases, the elevation of the many depends on authorizing and diffusing the cultivation of the few. Such explicit appeals to social hierarchy have earned Mill the reputation of being an "aristocratic liberal" (Kahan).

Seen from this perspective, Mill occupies the vanguard role he enjoys in Raymond Williams's account of English social thought (49). Williams has rightly emphasized the danger of Mill's reflexive recoil from the popular: "There are in fact no masses," he urges, "only ways of seeing people as masses" (300). From this view, Mill is at the forefront of an earnest but elitist line of liberal thinking, the counterproductive effect of which is to reify the classed, gendered, and racialized boundaries between high culture and low.

But, as the parallels with Foucault suggest, Mill's legacy is not reducible to that elitist tendency. Rather, in "Civilization" Mill articulated what is, in effect, one of the first postmodernist analyses of society. As Regenia Gagnier has argued, the 1890s, which saw the burgeoning of a mass consumer culture, "initiated an ideology of choice dependent on the proliferation of images" (54; cf. Richards 5). Mill's "postmodernist" move was not only to foresee the reign of representation in a commodity culture but also to describe its impact on the individual as a "mass of influences." Like Foucault in his late works, Mill evokes a society in which individuals are free to choose the terms of their own subjugating dependence. It is because power is, for Mill as for Foucault, imagined as a mode of action on the action of others that societies retain a glimmering potential for liberation. Both thinkers visualize this as the potential for strengthening individuality and enhancing the exercise of individual power. Yet for Mill and Foucault this emancipatory project—the project of promoting "new forms of subjectivity"—is, paradoxically, a veritable minefield of potentially "perverse effect[s]" (Foucault, "Subject" 216 and "Social Security" 160). For Mill, as for Foucault, pastorship—the means by which to build individuality without homogenizing individuals—is the central problematic of a modern liberal society.

Hence, Mill can in many respects enhance the critical imagining of Victorian governmentalization as much as Foucault himself. Although Mill's works demonstrate that nineteenth-century Britain was, for all its liberal allegiances, subject to perverse effects, Britain's history remains distinct from the Continental examples studied by Foucault. Mill's contemporaries jealously withheld pastoral power from the state. The state they built was envisioned as the guarantor of private property and, to a certain extent, as a

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neutral seat from which the civilized character of enlightened gentlemen might be gradually diffused. It was not until after the First World War that the state was viewed as a bureaucratic structure through which to implement the policies of professional experts. To the contrary, Mill's contemporaries fought zealously to reserve that function for themselves, to safeguard the personalized quality of pastoral power or—from another view—to neglect pastorship altogether.

Hence, in the British context, the critical imagining of governmentalization concerns, in Mill's terms, the question of how so-called self-government failed to be the government of "each by himself" and became instead the government "of each by all the rest"—a "social tyranny" that "enslaves the soul itself" in penetrating the very "details of life" (*Liberty* 46). Or, to put the same problem in Gagnier's terms, governmentalization concerns the question of how the individual's power to choose devolved into "an ideology of choice"—as powerless to emancipate individuals as is an uninformed public opinion to warrant the integrity of a representative democracy. Such issues demand a critical practice sensitive to the distinctive textures of Britain's liberal past: to its material history, to the social relations facilitated by that history, to the epistemological frame that gave those relations subjective meaning, and to the literary texts through which that frame was represented.

Such a critical imagining of Victorian history may, in turn, illuminate the resurgent neoliberalism of our own day. Victorian writers such as Dickens, Gaskell, and Ruskin were poised between the individualistic morality of the nineteenth century and the collective needs of the emerging welfare state. Today, by contrast, the welfare state has itself become an object of attack. What Nikolas Rose calls "advanced liberal rule" has thus sought "to degovernmentalize the State and to de-statize practices of government," relocating the pastoral mission to a market "governed by the rationalities of competition, accountability and consumer demand" (41).[20] Post-Foucauldian critics on the left have offered powerful critiques of social control but have yet to develop alternatives to the market's allegedly liberating approach to producing capable citizens. In the prominent liberal theory of John Rawls, political subjects are simply assumed to possess the qualities necessary for citizenship. Embracing atomist assumptions that Mill fought hard to contest, Rawlsian liberals set aside the character-building and community concerns that ignited Victorian literature. Mill's latter-day heirs thus neglect the aspect of his thought that, while prizing liberty and individuality "very highly," recognizes the "social embedding of human agents" (Taylor, "Cross-Purposes" 185; cf. Benhabib 157 and Ryan). In so doing, they enable conservatives to dismiss the pastoral credentials of the left.

Foucault's discernment of these political challenges, I believe, catalyzed the revision of his own Nietzschean project. Whereas the genealogical analysis of power was developed in response to the Marxist dilemmas of the 1970s, his essays on governmentality offer a fitting rejoinder to the ever-more-grandiose claims of free-market neoliberals. To move beyond *raison d'état* and beyond the new liberal orthodoxy, pastorship must involve ways of strengthening individuals without, simultaneously, engineering their conformity. Victorian literature's intense reflections on character and governance in a liberal society cannot but provide a valuable resource for this most timely critical enterprise, as well as the opportunity to imagine the history of a different kind of present.

Notes

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[1] See also the recent reevaluation of new historicism in Gallagher and Greenblatt, esp. 49–74.

[2] The term *liberalism* is, of course, riddled with contradiction: it can denote diverse political agendas, a set of capitalist economic ideologies, and/or a cultural commitment to the idea of freedom. My discussion of Victorian liberalism refers to a broad social movement and cultural mythology that culminated in the mid-Victorian years. One central feature was the perceived importance of limiting the power of centralized government. Space does not permit me to offer a detailed critique of competing strains of thought, a discussion of liberalism's relation to empire, or a thoroughgoing contrast between Victorian liberalism and the neoliberalism of our own day. These topics are explored more fully in Goodlad, *Victorian Literature*.

[3] According to Pat Thane, the eighteenth-century British state "had the will and the capacity to influence the lives of citizens" but "did so by methods markedly less visible than those of its European counterparts." Britain's "amateur administration," drawn from the local gentry and magistracy, "evaded the resentment aroused" by French officials and their "more openly severe legal powers" (5, 4). See also Brewer.

[4] Here and throughout, my discussion of Bentham's legacy focuses on his recommendations for a centralized, bureaucratic, tutelary state. On the tension between this "un-English" dimension of Bentham's thought and his contrary laissez-faireist allegiances, see Conway.

[5] For comparable assessments of the Lunacy Commission, mines inspection, and prisons see McCandless 90, Bartrip 79, and DeLacy 182–208.

[6] For a discussion of Tocqueville's contrast between France's reliance on "*la tutelle*" and Britain's "free *moeurs*," see Siedentop 164–71; Marx's belief that Britain lacked a "ready-made state machinery" was noted by Lenin (33–34); Young argued that the English bourgeoisie imitated the institutions of the upper classes (75); Gramsci pointed out that Britain's middle classes gained economic supremacy yet left "the old land-owning class [to] preserve its position of virtual monopoly" (18); Weber's works are peppered with illuminating references to Britain's distinctive status, some of which I cite below; I also note Taylor's and Foucault's remarks below.

[7] On genealogy's nonsubstantive approach to analyzing power, a Nietzschean innovation, see Schrift 187–88.

[8] On the importance of critical practices that recognize the nineteenth-century "dialectic of empire and home," see Viswanathan 62.

[9] In addition to Foucault's "Subject," my views on governmentality are drawn especially from his "Governmentality," "Space," "Social Security," and "Politics."

[10] Genealogical analysis tends to emphasize objectifying domination, reducing human subjectivity to the application of power on docile bodies, to "the effect and instrument of a political anatomy" (*Discipline* 30). In his later works, Foucault stressed subjectivizing processes, or "the way a human being turns him—or herself—into a subject" ("Subject" 208).

[11] Gramsci's notion of a dynamic, always contested "hegemony" thus provides a useful equivalence for Foucault's revised view of the underpinnings of truth.

[12] I allude to such early reforms as the 1834 New Poor Law, the introduction of the Metropolitan Police in 1828, and the Police Act of 1839. On the uneven implementation of police reforms, see Emsley, esp. 41–61.

[13] Laissez-faire is critiqued in Marx and Engels's *Manifesto*, where bourgeois freedom is seen to consist in the freedom of capital rather than of people (485–86). In his trenchant reply to present-day libertarians, G. A. Cohen argues that the state's protection of property, so far from being negative, constitutes a positive curb on the freedom of nonproprietors (56–57).

[14] On the use of blasphemy laws to repress political dissidence, see Marsh 78–126. Colonialism was, of course, a crucial aspect of state force. Under British rule, India devolved from a competitive producer into a deindustrialized consumer of British goods, becoming "the key to Britain's emergence as the workshop of the mid-nineteenth-century world" (Moore 76). British statesmen proclaimed the merits of free trade, even while the British economy depended on colonial force and domestic tarriffs (Radhakamal Mukerjee, qtd. in Chomsky 362–63).

[15] Foucault himself argues that the "word *rationalization* is dangerous"; critics must analyze "specific rationalities rather than always invoking the progress of rationalization in general" ("Subject" 210). On Kay-Shuttleworth's conflicting allegiances, see Goodlad, "'Making.'"

[16] These points are developed at length in Goodlad, *Victorian Literature*.

[17] A crucial exception was Mill's readiness to accept native "childishness" as a justification for empire. For a thoroughgoing critique, see Mehta.

[18] Carlyle had lamented the same modern phenomenon in "Signs of the Times" (1829): "No individual now hopes to accomplish the poorest enterprise single-handed and without mechanical aids . . ." (467). His subsequent quest for "heroes" represented a more romantic and less democratic version of Mill's call for character-building individuality.

[19] Marx and Mill had compatible commitments to individuality but differed markedly over means (Duncan). In *The German Ideology*, Marx and Engels described communism as a mode of organization that would liberate "individuality" from "the domination of material conditions" (464).

[20] On the appropriation of Victorian discourse in recent critiques of the welfare state, see Hadley; Joyce.

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