

Masters in Environmental Studies

Masaryk University, Brno, Czech Republic

November 2018

Class 3: Environmental subjects

Christos Zografos, PhD

JUH-UPF Public Policy Centre, Department of Political and Social Sciences, Pompeu Fabra University, Barcelona, Spain

christos.zografos@upf.edu



PUBLIC POLICY CENTER



Introduction

- Answers to question
- Subjects approach
- Premises on other theories
- Classroom activities

Today's reading

The reading

- Anything you learned?

Class question

- *“According to Robbins and his study, lawn managers who are **more aware** of the environmental impacts of chemicals, and are **more socially involved and concerned** about their communities, are those who **apply more intensively chemicals** on their lawns*
- *“**How** do Robbins' middle-class lawn maintainers (“lawn people”) end up using chemicals which they know that are harmful not only for the environment but also to their own health?”*
- *“**Why** do they do this to themselves and the environment?”*

Why do they do it?

Three reasons:

1. Hectic lives: no free time
2. Economic/ instrumental logics
3. The good citizen: moral responsibility to the community

Hectic lifestyles

- *“When I first moved here I was traveling a lot so I didn’t have time to do much in my yard. I thought, my lawn must need something, so I was treating it . . . I think of yard work as a fun activity . . . But I just don’t have the time anymore.”*
- Residents stated, with some degree of **pride**, **how busy** they and their families are with careers, hobbies, sports, and travel
- This often translated into a feeling that they **did not have time** to worry about lawn chemicals

Economic/ instrumental logics

- Association of chemicals inputs with **housing values** suggests **instrumental motivations**
- Conserving well the lawn = relatively **inexpensive investment** for maintaining property values
 - Note: this is a socio-ecological system where homeowners are **rewarded** for environmentally detrimental behaviour!
- Still: instrumental thinking *only a small part* of lawn manager-home owner logic

Beyond instrumentalism: **community**

- Despite risks, chemicals use = **good character; social responsibility**
- **Ecological character** of lawn: **collective management**
- Decisions to use chemicals: something **owed to neighbors**
 - *“I wouldn’t insult my neighbors by not keeping my house up”*



www.shutterstock.com · 537564295

The good citizen: moral responsibility

Lawn chemical use as something they felt they had to do to meet the **expectations** of their neighbours

Reveals: ways in which **neighborhood forces** (without *physical* coercion) certain kinds of lawn management onto individuals

- *...imperative to mow in time for high school prom. Limousines came to the cul-de-sac to pick up several high school students, **pictures** were taken on front lawns, and everyone wanted their yards **to look** perfect*
- *Suzanne: why she continued lawn chemical treatments even though her dog's paws were bleeding, she replied: I guess we didn't want the yard **to look** bad when everybody else's looked so nice . . . You try to make it **look** as nice as you can, without offending other people*

Disciplining

System of monitoring
(when to “improve” lawn)
that relies heavily on the
view of one’s lawn by
neighbors

- Neighbour’s gaze

When weeds grow prominent:

- *“I would feel really out of place. It’s not only how the yard looks to me, but **how it looks to the neighbors**. If it’s not in keeping with the neighborhood [then I’d have to spray more]”*
- *“[in his mom’s neighbourhood] if you don’t cut twice a week you are a communist!”*

The argument

Cos. benefit, but not force
anyone

- ❖ Power enacted **internally**
through producing a certain
kind of “**subject**”

*The maintenance of lawn yard
landscapes through
environmentally harmful lawn
chemicals is an **internalized**
environmental practice rooted on
a **socially enforced**
environmental aesthetic that
associates good citizenship
with **environmentally harmful**
activities (use of chemicals)*

Power shaping subjects

Subject (Foucault, 1982): two meanings of word "subject":

Both meanings suggest a form of power which **subjugates** and **makes subject to**

Q: Who is this subject?

- “turfgrass subjects” (p.115)
- Subject = **Lawn People!**

◇ subject *to someone else*

by **control** and

dependence

◇ tied to one's *own identity*

by a conscience or **self-**

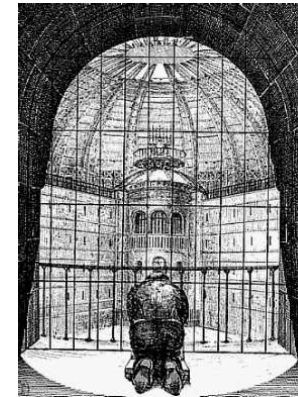
knowledge

Making subjects: self-disciplining

- Central problem of modern govt. (Foucault): “the **conduct of conduct** or else the power to act on the actions of others”
 - Modern governments develop **technologies of power** to achieve
- **Panopticon**: what is it?
 - Prisoner feels he’s been watched and has to behave at all times in case guard is watching (Sharpe, 2009)
 - By feeling he’s been watched all the time he **internalises the rule** of discipline (behave as he is required)
 - Guard doesn’t even need be there!



Presidio Modelo prison, Cuba (Source: Friman, 2005)



Source: /thefunambulist.net/thefunambulist.net/

Question: What's this??

Subjects and subject-making

Background to the approach

Foucault, power and liberalism

Foucault's interest:

- How power operates
- Emergence of 'technologies of power' in modern (roughly 17th century onwards) period (Europe)
- An interest on *liberalism*: key, modern political doctrine and practice of government

Liberalism (Britannica)

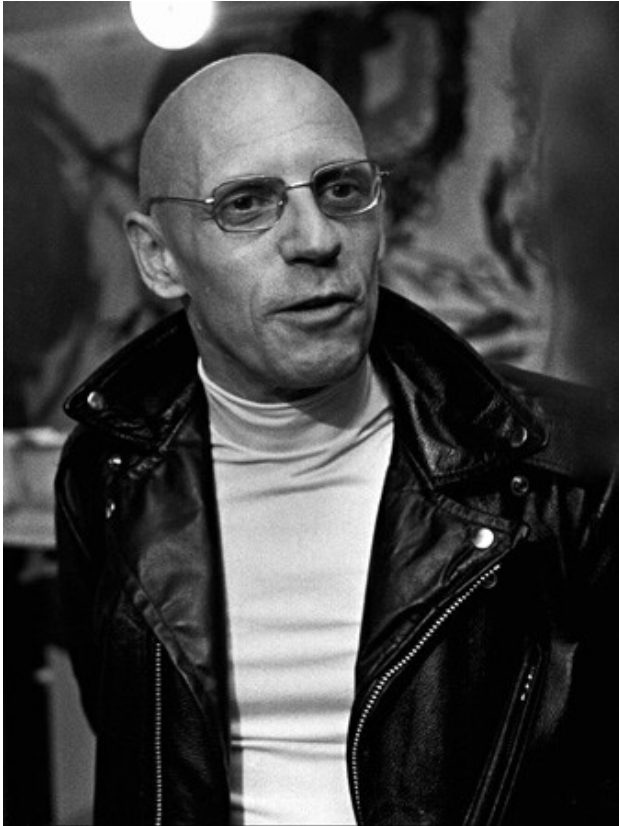
- Protecting and enhancing freedom of the individual = the central problem of politics
- Government is necessary to protect individuals from being harmed by others
- But government itself can pose a threat to liberty
- Laws, judges, and police are needed to secure the individual's life and liberty, but their coercive power may also be turned against him
- Problem: how to avoid (as much as possible) coercion/ authority abusing power but also secure individual liberty (do as one wants – more or less)?

Central problem of modern government

Iverson and Painter, 2005:

- Foucault identified the '**conduct of conduct**' as the central problem of modern government
- A way to deal with the central paradox of liberal government:
 - liberalism asserts sovereignty of free individual,
 - yet government requires that individual behaviour be regulated

Foucault: exercising power



Source: <http://www.michel-foucault.com>

- Power can be exercised in more **subtle** ways than outright oppression + coercion
- i.e. by establishing **normalised** and '**deviant**': behaviours (homosexuality), processes (democracy is inefficient), actions (stealing = crime), persons (lepers=unhealthy), places (Africa is dangerous, e.g. disease, crime, jungle), etc.
- People integrate these as **personal principles** that guide their behaviour -> (as – liberal – government) you no more need to punish or compensate
- They become **subjects**: individuals *subjected* (to the will/ desires of authority) through ties to own identity by self-knowledge (e.g. who you think you are)
- In this way governments (those 'in power') **discipline** behaviour, people (in general) or certain groups, etc. **without coercion**

Governmentality



- Governing that includes the active **consent** and willingness of individuals to participate in their own governance
- Or else: the governing of people's conduct through positive means

Not **sovereign** power: abide by laws and regulations of centralised power (e.g. royal power)

Not **disciplinarian** power: learn what to do and not to do; through punishment and reward (institutions that exercise authority)

Yes: the **willing participation** of the governed (consent and self-regulation)

Individual responsibility

Seeking to reshape people's subjectivities into individuals who are responsible for themselves and must seek self-improvement

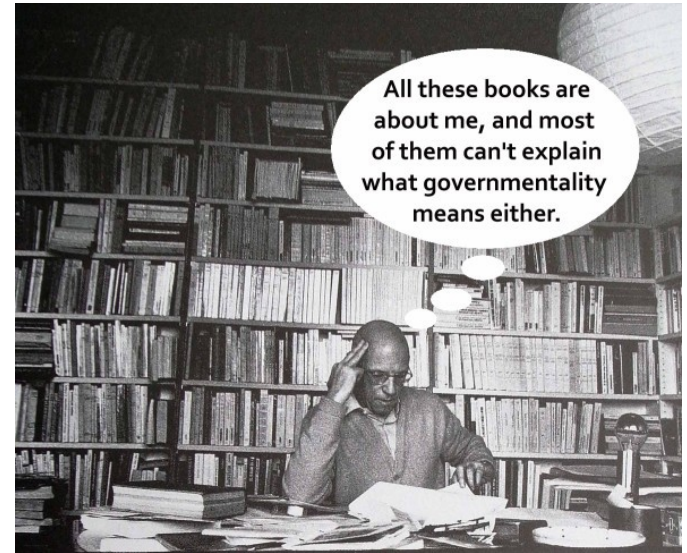
Self-responsibility and self-improvement (Hamann, 2009):

- Just as **illness and disease** are more often addressed in the mainstream media as a problem of revenue loss for business [and hospitals or government revenue] than as an **effect of poor environmental or worker safety regulations**, corporations have stepped up the practice of promoting **full worker responsibility** for their own health and welfare, offering incentives to employees for their **participation in fitness training, lifestyle management and diet programs**. We can also find a sustained expansion of "self-help" and "personal power" technologies such as new techniques promising greater control in the self-management of everything from time to anger.
- These and many other examples demonstrate the extent to which so much that was once understood as **social and political** has been re-positioned within the domain of **self-governance**, often through techniques imposed by private institutions such as schools and businesses.



Governmentality

- Way in which governments try to produce citizens (subjects) best suited to the ends and objectives of governments
 - A **style** of exercising power
- Organised **practices** through which subjects are governed (Mayhew, 2004)
 - Mentalities, rationalities, techniques
 - E.g think back on ‘Lawn People’ (subjects)



Source: <https://adrianblau.files.wordpress.com>

Activity: watch-n-discuss

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Xppoy2veSP0>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WfGMYdalCIU>

Vox: Game of Thrones is secretly all about climate change

- “...stopping it requires the world’s biggest nations – like China, India, and the US – to sacrifice a little in the short term and put away their political competition with each other.
- A collective action story... story Northern Wall and forces it holds at bay “is about the mistaken belief that industrial civilisation can stand against the changing forces of nature
- ...but if our zombies are climate change, and we are not doing nearly enough to prevent catastrophic global warming, who should you really be annoyed with?”

❑ **QUESTION: Who should you be annoyed with? How change?**

Halsey, 2004 (and ‘Man’ by Steve Cutts)

*But I want to suggest that structural economic power relies for its efficacy not simply on the relations between government, law, and the economy, so much as on the **flows of pleasure** which invest the **population** at any one time.*

*Not only is it profitable to be environmentally destructive (in the sense of mining, manufacturing cars, clearfelling forests) it **feels good too** (in the sense of purchasing a gold necklace, driving on the open road, looking at a table, chair, or house constructed from redwood, mahogany, mountain ash or the like).*

• **QUESTION: Who should you be annoyed with? How change?**

Take away points

- Green governance: governmentality
- **Internalised** power: Power can also be exercised internally
 - through construction of **subjects** who by understanding themselves in particular ways (e.g. “good citizens”) voluntarily (without coercion) serve state projects – e.g. produce nature in ways desired by state, corporations
 - E.g. turfgrass subjects or Lawn People



Copyright: David Hayward (source: geotimes.co.id)

Course overview: What stuck with you

Pick a partner and respond in a piece of paper:

1. An “Aha” moment
 - “Now I realise why...”
 - A pleasant surprise
 - Something you thought was particularly interesting
 - Something you didn’t expect
 - A solution
2. Something that you had to struggle with to understand
3. Something you don’t agree with
4. Something that you agree with strongly
5. Something you want to know more about
6. A question that you have

Course core arguments

Capitalism and environmental degradation

- Capital accumulation and the quest for value surplus produce environmental degradation; but also, environmental degradation is itself a condition for capital accumulation (surplus value)

Environmental **justice** (racialised natures)

- Racism produces environmental degradation, because it disproportionately offloads environmental 'bads' to non-white communities, depriving them of resources and reducing their capacities to maintain a healthy environment
- Environmental justice is about the fair: distribution of environmental goods and bads, participation in environmental decision-making, and representation of people's diverse ways of connecting to the environment no matter their race, gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation, or class or income levels. Both nat'l and int'l dimensions of environmental justice are important
- Othering helps forge an ideology for environmental discrimination and injustice (i.e. helps justify these). Discrimination naturalised through othering permits resource dispossession

Environmental **subjects** (internalised and diffuse power)

- Power can also be exercised internally, through the construction of subjects who by understanding themselves in particular ways (e.g. "good citizens") voluntarily (without coercion) serve state projects – e.g. produce nature in ways desired by state or corporations – even at the harm of themselves