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The family and ambiguity : the politics of alternative conceptions of self and society.

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THE FAMILY AND AMBIGUITY:
THE POLITICS OF ALTERNATIVE CONCEPTIONS OF
SELF AND SOCIETY

A Dissertation presented

by

PHILIP T. NEISSER

submitted to the Graduate School of the
University of Massachusetts in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

February 1990

Department of Political Science

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SELF AND SOCIETY

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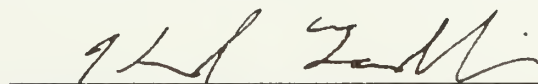
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For David E. Brown

In completion of a course I took years ago
(and of course in gratitude and admiration)

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ABSTRACT

THE FAMILY AND AMBIGUITY:
THE POLITICS OF ALTERNATIVE CONCEPTIONS OF SELF AND
SOCIETY

FEBRUARY 1990

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In this work I argue on the one hand that the modern family of the west deserves criticism for its role in the persistence of unmet need, of hurtful and unnecessary inequality, and of a harmful management, denial and denigration of difference. On the other hand, I also argue that the modern family deserves some defending, both for its role in creating us as people for whom the legitimacy of our order can be an issue, and because it is a locus of much that people experience as worthwhile.

I am concerned in this work not only with the ambiguity of the modern family, but also with the general problem posed by ambiguity and affirmation. I approach this issue from the point of view on an "ontology of discordance." By this view, each way of constructing a self (and so any possible way of forming society) necessarily involves exclusion and loss, and perhaps means denial and

denigration as well. I do not think, however, that this fact is necessarily any cause for "pessimism," as there are still grounds on which to defend social order as an achievement. In particular the fact of discordance calls on us to create forms of order which acknowledge their own impositional quality. This means that we must create greater institutional space for unmanaged difference.

Along these lines, I affirm the importance, in modern conditions, of maintaining a category of "family," but by this term I mean only a relation whereby child care and household are accorded some distance from the state and from the "public" realm. The point is that we should avoid detailing what constitutes a "family" and instead provide vastly increased across the board support for multiple forms of householding. In particular we need to support all the individuals who care for and protect children.

My conclusion is that under modern conditions this kind of minimalist defense of family best serves the causes of equality for women, space for difference, and the end of the imposition of social class.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

In this work I defend two related claims. On the one hand I argue that the modern family of the west deserves criticism for its role in the persistence of unmet need, of hurtful and unnecessary inequality, and of a harmful management, denial and denigration of difference. These crimes are systematic features of modern order, and today's family is both directly and indirectly part of their perpetration; it serves as one of modern society's mechanisms of provision, division, and management, and it also helps to provide legitimacy to the social order which deploys these mechanisms. On the other hand, I also argue that the modern family deserves some defending, first of all for its role in creating us as people for whom the legitimacy of our order can be an issue, and second of all because it is a locus of much that people experience as worthwhile or even deeply satisfying. In sum, both the modern family form and the modernity of which it is a part are profoundly ambiguous in their implications and effects. They are deserving of criticism at the most

basic level, in that they do harm by virtue of characteristics that are central to what they are, but they also stand as real achievements, worthy of being defended as such.

Neither of these claims are new, but I think it important to make them together, and so in this work I try to delineate some of the ways that the modern family plays its ambiguous role. This is not, however, the only goal that shapes the following pages. I also have been motivated by a concern to confront an issue raised by ambiguity in general; this is the problem of how in the first place it is possible to make any affirmations -- defend, celebrate or recommend anything -- if what is "good" can (even from the same point of view) at the same time be seen to be "bad." I believe not only that this is possible, but that it is desirable, even essential. We (if I can be rude and ethnocentric and use this pronoun to personalize the culture of the west which so dominates the world today) need both to make affirmations despite ambiguity and to affirm ambiguity even as we make other affirmations.

This claim is also not new, but I hope in this work to add to the discussion of just what is involved and at stake in affirming ambiguity (and to be newly persuasive) by virtue of the way I connect these issues to the particular institution of the modern family. Many of us

experience the ambiguities of life very powerfully in our families, and at the same time the institution of the family is implicated in some of our modes of denying ambiguity. This means that the family is implicated in some important forms of power. The discussion of family, then, can (I believe) provide evidence both of the importance of acknowledging ambiguity and of the very existence of that ambiguity.

In this introduction I do four things: I explain (very provisionally) what I mean by "the modern family," I summarize my overall argument, I explain what I set out to do in each of the chapters that follow, and I point out some of the limitations of this effort.

Today's Family

Today's "family" exists in at least two ways -- it is a social and economic institution, and it is an image that circulates.

While the ideal of family is far from the norm, as a set of assumptions it forms the basis of a host of features of our society: wage levels, taxes, custody rulings, benefits, names, etc. A particular form of household is enforced as the most successful means available of pooling resources, avoiding isolation and loneliness, ensuring the ability of parents and children to stay together, and avoiding invasive regulatory intervention.

The same assumptions that structure our options in these tangible ways also operate on us as assumptions. There are of course a great variety of views -- both academic and personal -- regarding the meaning of "family," and the differences between them are important, but there is nonetheless enough commonality among them to speak of a single ideal of the family as predominant in the west. "The family" as an image stands at the very least for harmony, intimacy, stability, and mature responsibility, and it also incorporates (somewhat shifting) assumptions about gender roles, gender identity, class aspirations, personal aspirations, and political involvement.

Argument #1: The Modern Family and Power

One aspect of the modern family's connection to power is fairly straightforward. The modern family is implicated in "oppression."

Oppressive power denies or prohibits, and the structuring of our society around a certain form of family helps deny the provision of needs to many. The family is placed in charge of meeting certain needs, but even "model" families cannot meet these needs and many people don't live in model families. Many needs that the family fails to address or addresses inadequately go largely unmet, and for many people in the bottom half of our socio-economic strata this means a good deal of privation.

Specifically, many people in modern societies lack economic and emotional security, protection from abuse and options to abusive relationships, a place they can call home, and adequate nutrition, medicinal care and education.

Oppression of this sort exists alongside the continuing legitimacy of the institutions that are party to it, including the family. This legitimacy can be accounted for partly by reference to another aspect power not easily captured by the idea of "oppression." It is also poorly rendered by the concept of "ideology," although it does have to do with the way outlooks, judgments, and goals are produced. This power concerns not so much the denial of need as the way people's "needs" are constituted. This form of power can be (and has been) called "normalization" or "subjugation."

Normalization works, first, by classing some people as below the threshold of normality and then subjecting them to different treatment -- aid, therapy, regulation -- than that received by others. It works second by encouraging those above the threshold to interpret their internal murmuring, resistance, or disquietude as signs of their chances of falling into abnormality and deviance, of losing that integrated status that makes them qualify as people with rights and interests. To be deployed around a

norm is to be pressured to fit in and to police oneself so that one fits in.

Normalization is at work when welfare recipients are classed as immoral or lazy, when poverty is explained as the result of bad family ways, and perhaps when many in the United States blame the Soviet Union for modern tendencies of centralization and social management. In each case the classifiers are constructing themselves and the world so that they can view themselves as free and as ethical (they earn what's theirs, they contribute to a free system of government, they resist temptations), and in each case the categories can operate to make people police themselves (construct themselves as productive, as members of good families, as ready to be mobilized against "socialist tendencies").

Normalization differs from oppression in that it doesn't imply so easily an opposite called "liberation." To be pressured to become and remain within the normal is different than to be held down and forbidden from something. In fact, a commitment to liberation can play a role in enhancing or maintaining effects of normalization, and this is true regardless of whether freedom is seen as the exercise of rights by those qualified or, alternatively, as self-realization through integrative participation in a radical or alternative community. The taming of normalization requires slack, or space, in the

order; not simply an alternative to the prevailing vision of the good life.

Argument #2: The Family as Worth Having

While the modern family is implicated in onerous forms of power, the tremendous appeal of the family idea cannot be adequately explained by reference to effects of normalization, any more than it can be explained by reference to the powerful interests sometimes served by this appeal. This is where the second part of my argument comes in. The modern family has a basis in human nature and in the human condition (as we shall see, to call something "natural" is neither to give that something an automatic grant of legitimacy nor to make an uncontestable claim). Because of this, and because order is not entirely successful at appropriating and putting to use this human nature, the reality of family experience cannot be reduced to a prop of order. It is more than that. Our order, similarly, is more than mere order; it is not entirely unredeemable. The disciplining of the modern self is costly and deserves critique, but should not be simply dispensed with.

What is the "natural basis" of today's family form? To be human is, it seems, to be embodied, finite, reflective (in various ways and degrees), dependent for existence on some sort of pattern of social relations, and formed as a

self by virtue of participation in some set of moral, rather than merely utilitarian, allegiances. If for the moment we understand by the term "family" simply the marking of kin ties, however done, family is an apparently universal response to these features of human life. To put it another way, humans have so far as we can tell invariably used the category of the biological to help make concrete distinctions amongst each other -- to posit specific obligations, and to recognize specific shared memories and experiences.

That something is natural does not mean it presents no problems; it does suggest that it may be hard to dispense with or dispensed with only at great cost. I think that some kind of valorization of specific personal ties between generations deserves defending because of the way it serves to create selves as caring and moral. The recognition and experience of involuntary ties to specific others, to the past, and to the future, serve as a means to "ground" caring -- as a means to make the experience of caring for others an aspect of identity, rather than dependent on a merely voluntary concordance of feelings.

It can be looked at this way: the fact of personal ties to past and future gives us each a story, and it is by thinking of ourselves as a part of a narrative that we each come to have an identity -- to come to see ourselves as an "I." But here's the ambiguity again. Such ties are

"tangible" not only in the real existence of parents and children but also in the ways that the raising of children binds people to the specific future that their social institutions are pointed towards. In fact, our tenuousness and our ambivalence towards the ideal of family is rooted not only in the structures of mobility that undermine actual families and not only in the recognition that we sometimes have of the losses that families impose on us, but also in the doubts many of us have in the worth of the specific future we are building.

The Chapters

In chapter one I present the interpretation of modern western culture and institutions in which I situate my discussion of the politics of the contemporary family. This interpretation is composed of two claims. The first is that modern western social orders (and increasingly this means the global order they command and depend on) are sustained by heavily enforced but nonetheless fragile assumptions of the possibility of concord, or harmony, inside the self and between the self and its world. This mode of order has its benefits, but, I argue, it exacts heavy costs as well.

The second claim is that our problems of order, self, and freedom can be best understood from a point of view which has been dubbed "the ontology of discordance."

According to this view there can be no concord of self and world, as each way of constructing a self has as a byproduct the creation of particular forms of disharmony. And according to this view it is at least possible to conceive of forms of order which acknowledge such disharmony. Such order could be, the argument continues, less oppressive and normalizing. The ontology of discordance thus offers a vision of life as thoroughly politicized and a vision of democracy as the appropriate mode of living together given this fact.

In chapter two I discuss the role of the institution of family in the modern order. Specifically, I discuss the ways this institution participates in oppression and normalization. I focus on the way assumptions of concordance embedded in our familial discourse and practice play a role in these forms of power. While I am in this discussion especially concerned with criticizing today's family, both as institution and image, I nevertheless end up defending it as well, as the power of the family to do harm stems in part from the good that it offers.

I put off this issue of the modern family as achievement until chapter four, and in chapter three I attempt to buttress the case I have made in chapter two by showing that assumptions of concordance, and so normalizing

implications, are indeed built into much of today's discourse on family.

In chapter four I return to the philosophy of discordance, first by discussing some views of the modern family which assume discordance rather than concordance, but which do so in accordance with the assumptions of psychoanalytic theory, rather than the more genealogical approach I rely on in chapter two. I argue that the psychoanalytic tradition, while offering important insight, tends to lead to the undue valorization of the concept of "personality," at the expense of the apparently extra-familial spheres of political culture, political history, and occupational structure. Moreover, when the latter are given their proper due the psychological evidence appears inconclusive with regard to the question of what is to be done. The psychological approach points us toward the question of the "right" mode of family, and this, I argue, does more harm than good.

I offer instead a "minimalist" defense of family. By this view "family" should be held to signify not so much a particular form of child care or household as instead a relation whereby child care and household are accorded some distance from the state and from the "public" realm where everything is considered equally everyone's business. This does not mean that "the private" is not political; it is. The point is to insist on the

maintenance of an institutionalized distinction between the public and the private, even as the nature of this distinction is rightly a matter vigorous debate. The point is also that we should avoid detailing what constitutes a family and instead provide vastly increased across the board support for all the individuals who care for and protect children.

Conclusion, Limitations, and Qualifications

The central limitation of this work stems from its broad range. It is quite likely that each of the many claims I make are better made elsewhere. The point, again, is to make them together. For example, today's image of family as the seat of intimacy, the only possible "home" for harmony, and the proper locus of personal commitment is more hurtful to women than it is to men (even as it hurts us all in some ways). This is a grave injustice, but in this work I am not so much concerned with demonstrating this as with asserting that its persistence is linked to assumptions of concord that are widely held, linked to "the family," but highly problematic. I have enough trouble making clear just I what I mean by this without also trying to "prove" or even exhaustively delineate the other claims I merely assert or rely on. Because of my focus, this work might not qualify as "feminist" in the strongest sense of the word. I want to say, however, that

it not only is rooted in a feminist commitment but is also entirely dependent on the prior existence of the feminist movement and feminist political thought. Without feminism, this book could not exist. I am especially concerned to say this because feminist theory, like other forms of theory, often relies on assumptions of concordance, and I use some of the pages in this text calling attention to this and labelling it a problem.

To summarize again my overall purpose, I am concerned in this work to show how the ambivalent import of family is, like the ambivalent import of our ideas of legitimacy, typically lost in our discourse, theoretical and otherwise. This is, I argue, because of the dominance (and institutionalization) of a philosophy of concordance. I want to make the case that the modern private family should be evaluated from the point of view of discordance. We should, in other words, do a kind of "cost-benefit analysis" at the level of the self.

My particular version of this evaluation leads to this conclusion: today's family is thoroughly bound up with a kind of enabling that is particularly disabling when it comes to political change. This is partly because of its location within a civilization built around the pursuit of growth, affluence, and concordance. On the other hand this criticism should be tempered by the recognition that we will need something like today's family if we are to

strive towards a less normalizing and oppressive order, if, in other words, we are to develop individual empowerment, slack in the order, space for difference, and (a condition of many other goals) a political movement to tame growth imperatives.

This historical possibility does not require a complete overthrow of modern traditions; instead it would mean a kind of wholesale shift, a rearrangement of elements to accommodate the loosening of growth imperatives and the cultural acknowledgment of the inevitability of arbitrariness and injustice in any social form. The most complete change might not be noticed as such: this would be a transformed understanding of politics. The politics of the self would come to be an issue. And so the social policing of families would, without necessarily coming to an end, be referred to by some metaphor which expressed its impositional and political character. It would be contested.

This argument is, I think, likely to appeal mostly to those who already wonder at the legitimacy enjoyed by modern orders, and who have perhaps thus far dealt with this problem by expressing disappointment in the working class, crediting "ideological" machinery as too powerful to overcome, seeing structural obstacles to change as all-encompassing, or placing their hopes in an impending immiseration and collapse of legitimacy. In fact our

investment in the current order is founded in reason, fraught with ambiguity, enforced by various imperatives and disciplines, and subject to change.

CHAPTER 2

THE ONTOLOGY OF DISCORDANCE

In this chapter I present the interpretation of modern western culture and institutions in which I situate my discussion of the politics of the contemporary family. The argument is that modern western social orders (and increasingly this means the global order they command and depend on) are sustained by heavily enforced but nonetheless fragile assumptions of the possibility of concord, or harmony, inside the self and between the self and its world. This mode of order has its benefits, but it exacts heavy costs as well.

It is probably inevitable that humans will deal with life's ambiguities and finitude by creating compensatory philosophies of concordance. People are, in Nietzsche's words, "homesick animals." Modernity, however, has its own special version of concordance, with the subject at its center. The modern order is perhaps unique in the degree to which it relies on, and produces, the pursuit of concord, rather than a less demanding and less aggressive assumption of concord. God no longer guarantees that we

are at home; instead home seems to lie at the point where we have created conditions of existence for ourselves which we endorse upon reflection.

This idea of legitimacy is responsible for some very real and important achievements, but it has a "normalizing" or subjugating element built into it; and this emerges powerfully in the context of the modern economic order. Modern legitimacy has this repressive potential because it lacks an appreciation of the "dirt" and ambiguity lodged in any ideal. And this is particularly a problem because our world (not coincidentally) is increasingly a single order requiring extensive social management and governed by demanding imperatives. In this situation, the aggressive quest for legitimacy all too easily turns inward; people tend to define themselves so they can see themselves as free (and the order as legitimate) within the existing constraints. And numerous institutions, practices and linguistic distinctions support this process.

To put it another way, the pursuit of concord is implicated in forces of social control. The conventions required for the order to function become norms, people are encouraged or impelled to produce themselves in accordance with those norms, and room for the unpredictable, the eccentric, the new, the reborn, the

rebellious, or simply the different, is squeezed away. In response to this we need more than rights. We need to tame the imperatives of the order and introduce a healthy suspicion of our categories.

I explain this notion of the modern order in the pages ahead, and then go on in the following chapters to argue that the modern institution of family plays a pivotal, and ambiguous, role in the processes of the reproduction of that order. The modern family is on the one hand the locus of much of the best of our modern world, while on the other hand it a central means of the maintenance of much of the worst. The ambiguous import that family has for most of us is in a way an analogue for, or a representation of, the ambiguous import of modernity itself.

First, however, a word about theory. I formulate my position with the help of assumptions about the self and the world which are in keeping with what William Connolly calls an "ontology of discordance." I begin, in other words, with assumptions of disharmony, rather than concord.¹ This is akin to what is often called a

¹See Connolly, Politics and Ambiguity (The University of Wisconsin Press, 1987), esp. pp. 9-16, and also Jane Bennett, who speaks of "fractious holism." Unthinking Faith and Enlightenment: Nature and the State in a Post-Hegelian Era (New York University Press, 1987), pp. 149-150.

"genealogical" approach. As Michael J. Shapiro explains, "Genealogy views every form of life as producing its human identities and systems of value in a struggle with other possible forms of life."²

In my view this perspective is invaluable in coming to terms with the meaning and effects of the modern institution of family. On the other hand I also think that the more traditional questions of political theory -- specifically questions of human nature and human needs -- must also be given at least provisional and situated answers if the modern family is to be understood. Kin demarcations and kin loyalties speak to some of the deepest needs of human beings. The trick is to make one's affirmations, as well as one's critique (concerning human nature and human needs), consistent with assumptions of disharmony. This "trick" is of course necessary to make my position on the family hold together, but, more importantly, it is also essential in the process of building any politics of social change which stands a chance of allowing for a less controlling, less demanding, less "productive" form of order. This, at least, is my conviction. This work is, therefore, not just about the family and politics; it is about theory as well. A theory

²"Politicizing Ulysses," Political Theory Vol. 17, N. 1 (February 1989), p. 22.

of ambiguity can tell us about the modern family, and today's politics of family can tell us about the need to acknowledge ambiguity in theory.

Ontologies of Concord

An ontology is a point of view, or theory, that speaks to the nature of being in some way. A social ontology is a set of understandings concerning the nature of human being and its relation to the world. Modern political theories, says Connolly, are, for the most part, alike in that each

gravitates toward an ontology of concord. That is, each assumes that when properly constituted and situated the individual or collective subject achieves harmony with itself and with the other elements of social life.³

Theories which are alike in assuming concord can otherwise be very different. One way to assume concord is to privilege the individual subject as an essence.⁴ Some theories instead privilege the community as the medium through which individuals can situate and realize their essence. The individualist theories currently enjoy political ascendancy compared to the more collectivistic ones, and the former are also (typically) more celebratory

³Connolly, Politics and Ambiguity, p. 10.

⁴To cite a contemporary example, see John Rawls, A Theory of Justice (Oxford University Press, 1971).

(rather than critical) of contemporary western social, economic, and political arrangements. These differences are certainly of great political import. On the other hand, their shared assumption of concord is also important. They are all based, to use Connolly's words, on "the principle of a subject realizing its essence in a larger world."⁵ They are, that is, based on an ontology of concord.⁶

What, more precisely, is the assumption of concord that is so widely shared? It is, in brief, the assumption that the world and the self are constructed such that there is (or could be) a "common good" consistent with the nature of the actual or potential self. One version of this assumption holds that there is such a thing, at least potentially, as a self which is at "home" in the world. To be at home is to occupy "a place of meaning in a meaningful world," says Jane Bennett, just as to experience disharmony between the self and its world as a problem to be overcome is "homesickness."⁷ This kind of

⁵Politics and Ambiguity, p. 9.

⁶Bennett likewise uncovers this affinity between parties otherwise opposed -- they being in this case the various sides in the environmental debate. She shows them to be distributed between the poles of "environmental management" and "natural holism," both of which are dependent on a faith in the possibility concord. See Unthinking Faith and Enlightenment, p. 4.

⁷Unthinking Faith and Enlightenment, p. 2. Bennett is following Nietzsche in characterizing modern philosophy as one more example of "homesickness."

"optimism" about the possibilities of being at home is often combined (by Marx, for example) with a trenchant critical reading of the "homelessness" imposed by current orders.

I am all for trenchant critique -- our modern orders deserve plenty -- but I also think, following Connolly, that there is a problem when such critique is bound up with, or based on, a "politics of the common good" which assumes that individuality and commonality can in the right context be made to "harmonize nicely."⁸ Marx's idea of harmony is repeated, albeit in a very different way, in the work of the "individualists," such as Hobbes and Locke, whom he opposed. In a certain sense Hobbes is a philosopher of discordance, as he is quite "pessimistic" about the possibility for selves to be "at home" in the world. He considers the self and world to be divided. On the other hand Hobbes holds on to the idea of harmony in his notion of individuals as rational agents, transparent to themselves, or at least properly held responsible to answer to the reasonable dictates of order, as underwritten by God and his law. The goal for Hobbes, as for Locke, is to spell out the rational way for human beings to adjust to the fact that they are not and will never be fully at home in the world.

⁸Politics and Ambiguity, p. 6.

I in many ways share this goal, but I cannot similarly speak of individuals as separate from "the world" in which they cannot be at home.⁹ And once this assumption of division is suspended it becomes impossible to use the word "rational" as Hobbes did. All ways of adjusting to the world are also ways of adjusting the self, and these have internal as well as external costs.¹⁰ There is no one "rational" mode of adjustment.

The idea shared by Marx and Hobbes is that of the true, or consistent, self. Whether thought of as a state to be achieved or as already naturally occurring, the coherent self is understood by both as a being centered by a self-consciousness who has a sense of her/his own integrity, who can be held accountable, and who adheres to rational truth criteria. By this modern view of the person, the impulses that are unthought and which manifest themselves as intrusions upon the subject ought to be (or already are) chosen among, ranked, channeled, assessed, or integrated by the subject in a way that is rational and harmonious. Herein lies the danger; modern political

⁹Thus Bennet speaks of the philosophy of discordance as "fractious holism." The self is, like the world in general, a multiplicity which cannot be entirely integrated, but the self is not separate from the world. "...human and non-human elements ...are interconnected, constituted in part by their relations to one another." Unthinking Faith and Enlightenment, p. 149.

¹⁰See Connolly on Hobbes, Politics and Ambiguity, p. 12.

theories tend to overlook and even abet the extension of pressures to define oneself within the ambit of the "normal." To see how this is the case we need to look at the self, and at the history of the modern self, from the point of view of the philosophy of discordance.

The Discordant Self

The "Other" is the term used by Michel Foucault, as well as by Bennett and Connolly, to refer to those aspects of self and of bodily experience which intrude upon the ordered reality striven for by self-consciousness; the Other is that which, within a particular way of ordering the self, does not fit into that ordering. It is "the locus of wishes, feelings, and desires that escape articulation," e.g., disorder, irrationality, madness, covert impulses of resistance, and eccentricity.¹¹ Every world necessarily has its Other.

By this view, we should accept both of the following propositions. First, "the homecoming [of the self] cannot be arranged, for there is no set of philosophical or political or psychological conditions where the fit between self and world will be neat," and, second, there

¹¹Connolly, Politics and Ambiguity, p. 106. See also Bennett, Unthinking Faith and Enlightenment, p. 6, and Foucault, The Order of Things: An Archeology of the Human Sciences (Random House, 1970), p. 328.

is no single and most rational way to adjust to homelessness.¹² This is because, on the one hand, each way of constructing a self has as a byproduct the creation of particular forms of disharmony, and, on the other hand, there are no rational (independent in principle from any particular order and its way of life) criteria by which one could select a particular mode of living as incontestably superior.

Since the self is not "designed" to fit perfectly into any way of life, we must anticipate that every good way of life will both realize something in the self and encounter elements in the self resistant to its form ...¹³

This notion of the Other is meant to draw attention to the commonalities of theories of concord which, whether or not they recognize that our current social orders spawn their own forms of the Other, nonetheless postulate harmony -- the absence of an Other -- as a conceivable and desirable state of affairs. It is for example often taken for granted, in the debate over whether or not it makes sense to say that people are "alienated," that there is a true self from which we are or are not so divided. This notion of self is very important to modern institutions and modern achievements. It is this self which is

¹²Bennett, Unthinking Faith and Enlightenment, pp. 1-2.

¹³Connolly, Ambiguity and Politics, p. 114.

understood to confer authority, which is taken as capable of being held responsible for her/his actions, and which is contrasted with those considered lacking in rights, incapable of responsibility, disorganized, out of order, and, in a word, irrational. It is also this self which modern societies (and revolutionary movements) so often promise us as a measure of their legitimacy. Citizens are urged to pursue and express their true selves, to "find themselves," usually with the proviso that the results fit in with the prevailing standards for selfhood and the economic imperatives of order.

Unfortunately, in order to see ourselves as free and at home we typically adjust ourselves to accommodate the imperatives of the order and the prevailing standards of rational behavior. Alternatively, we sometimes find a stance from which to critique the existing order by making reference to a idea of the authentic self which could be realized in a transformed world. Either way a profoundly anti-political urge is built into our standards for legitimacy. The idea is that humans should be at home in a meaningful world, and the result is not only that political power is considered to appropriately rest on the consent of such beings, but also that such power is encouraged to work to "assist" and so transform or control those not capable of reasoned consent or hampered by false

consciousness. In sum, forces of normalization are built into the modern pursuit of legitimacy.

The ontology of discordance attempts to both locate instances of normalization and enable resistance to it. It does this by offering a vision of life as thoroughly politicized and a vision of democracy as the appropriate mode of living together given this fact. Life is, for humans at least, profoundly ambiguous, and we need standards of legitimacy and institutions of order which take this into account. This is, for Connolly at least, what democracy at its best is all about.

Democratic politics of the sort endorsed here does not eliminate the need for norms. It insists upon it. But when conditions are right, and when a sufficient number of citizens have affirmed discordance as part of the human condition, democratic turbulence subdues the politics of normalization. It supports the ambiguous relation to public life essential to freedom.¹⁴

Given my purpose -- to speak of the ways the modern family bears on issues of power and democracy -- I need to point to what is implied but not spelled out in this connection. Freedom requires an ambiguous relation to private life as well as public life. It requires, to be more exact, the valorization of our already existing ambiguous relation to private and public life. Democratic turbulence is a healthy thing when it comes to processes

¹⁴Politics and Ambiguity, p. 15.

of coming to (and challenging) collective understandings of the norms of public life and the politics of personal life. Our thought about what "family" is and should be is best undertaken with the help of assumptions of discordance.

To go on and make this case I need to say a good deal more about normalization, and to this end I will follow Foucault, Bennett, Connolly, and Charles Taylor in comparing modern ontologies of concord to an ontology of concord which preceded them and which, by its decline, marks the onset of modernity.

Concord in a Meaningful Order

The world is seen, from this earlier vantage point, as an integrated, meaningful whole. This western view can be characterized, says Bennett, as a "Robust Faith" -- robust, that is, compared to the weakened faith that endured the transformation of the enlightenment and subsequently the rise of modern science and industrialism. From the point of view of robust faith, "The world is a creation, a vast web whose threads are those of resemblance."¹⁵ Charles Taylor, referring more broadly to all western traditions prior to modernity, speaks of the

¹⁵Unthinking Faith and Enlightenment, p. 9.

notion of the world as a "meaningful order."¹⁶ The long dominant idea of the world as filled with purpose and speaking through resemblance is expressed, to use Taylor's example, in the notion that because there are seven holes in the head there must be seven planets.¹⁷ "...the notion is that different elements in creation express or embody a certain order of ideas."¹⁸ Foucault put it this way: "Up to the end of the sixteenth century, resemblance played a constructive role in the knowledge of Western culture."¹⁹

The self is, by this view, defined by its relation to this order. The world is alive with meanings -- for robust faith these meanings are the words of God's text -- and the proper role of humans is to put themselves in tune with these meanings. By this view, "...man came most fully to himself when he was in touch with a cosmic order."²⁰ Humans are thought to be special in their role as the interpreters of this order. For robust faith, "Knowledge consists of an approximate recovery of divine intentions embodied in the natural world and revealed in signs."²¹ Mortal knowledge is, by this view, necessarily

¹⁶Hegel (Cambridge University Press, 1975), pp. 3-11.

¹⁷Hegel, p. 4.

¹⁸Hegel, p. 5.

¹⁹The Order of Things, p. 17.

²⁰Taylor, Hegel, p. 6.

²¹Bennett, Unthinking Faith and Enlightenment, p. 10.

incomplete and imperfect. We moderns are likely to see the ambiguities in the signs as "evidence" that the notion of a meaningful order is an illusion, but this is not the only way to interpret this lack. From the point of view of robust faith it shows the opaqueness of the order to limited human reason, as well as "the temporality and finitude of material things."²²

In such a meaningful order, a concord of the cosmos is guaranteed by presumption, whatever the state of human knowledge and human affairs. If this presumption of incompletely visible harmony can be sustained, a considerable amount of experienced disharmony, difference, anomaly and mystery can, it follows, find space for itself, at least in the sense that its meaning is experienced as ambiguous. That which is "Other" is, on the one hand, threatening -- it is sin, madness, error, or evil. On the other hand, it is also a sign of the limits to mortal abilities of interpretation -- it expresses limits, mystery, and hidden truth. Its existence does not indicate that the universe is not a harmonious whole, does not necessarily pose a challenge to existing customs and understandings, and does not call automatically for corrective action of cure or assimilation.

²²Bennett, Unthinking Faith and Enlightenment, p. 10.

The relation to Otherness of ambiguity does not, it should be understood, by any means automatically redeem medieval practices regarding that which did not fit in. This is not the point. The comparison of then and now can, however, draw attention to hard to redeem features of modern practices. Foucault has done this by counterposing older and modern understandings of the relation of truth and madness. "In the Middle Ages and until the Renaissance, man's dispute with madness was a dramatic debate in which he confronted the secret powers of the world." We have travelled from this point to "our own experience, which confines insanity within mental illness."²³ Madness now is no less fear-inspiring and fascinating, but it is medicalized or assimilated to reason, rather than excluded and wondered at.

A purposeful world can, finally, be characterized by the notion of authority that it sustains. "Authorities," says Connolly speaking of the late middle ages, "claimed some privileged access to the purposiveness of the world."²⁴ Authority was seen to be present everywhere, as all of creation is an expression of God's will. Authorities in such a world are those who are convincing in their claim

²³Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason (Random House, 1965), p. xii.

²⁴Politics and Ambiguity, p. 129.

to interpret "God's signs" authoritatively, particularly as found in sacred texts. Their interpretations may be, and sometimes were, challenged, but as long as authority is thought to reside in the teleological structure of the universe there is a presumption in favor of existing social customs. The past and its expression in the present are privileged as lived moments of creation, themselves subject to various interpretations.

The Transition to Modernity

Most of us, of course, do not experience or speak of the world as a text expressing God's purpose. Nor is this idea taken seriously in public parlance or in the scientific community. What has happened to presumptions of telos? They survive in weakened form: in the practice of fragile, small, very dependent, somewhat privileged communities; in faith's "attempt to locate one's true life in a world beyond;" in the championing of Platonic and Aristotelian political theory; and to some extent in fast-disappearing non-modern cultures.²⁵ The theory and practice of these communities provides an important critique of and counterpoint to modern societies, but the idea of telos has trouble consistently engaging widespread adherence in its own right.

²⁵Bennett, Unthinking Faith and Enlightenment, p. 21.

To explain the decline of telos and its current defensive posture, we would have to consider at least the following: the flaws and contradictions in the idea of the universe as a harmonious order of meaning; the inability of medieval faith to survive certain economic and political changes; an "inadequacy" of medieval faith from the point of view of modern economic processes and political structures (with their very demanding imperatives of social coordination); the highly visible technical achievements that have come with the new "enlightenment" ideas which put human beings much more in the center of things; the possibility for a variety of new and powerful understandings of human freedom and rights which have come with those same ideas; the institutional edifice of consumption which makes revised understandings incompatible with making a living for so many people; the power of people's ongoing identification with the order in which they have invested so much of themselves; and, finally, the effect of the various disciplines which help make people into selves who try to see themselves as free, and so who can "identify with" and "invest themselves into" the current order.

As one speaking from the point of view of an ontology of discordance, I am not calling for or hankering after the restoration of robust faith. I therefore can beg off the

difficult task of discussing every element involved in the decline of telos.²⁶ What I want to stress is that the transition to modernity meant a new idea of the self and its relation to nature. This makes it important that we consider the problems inherent in the medieval premise of telos, not in order to "correct" them, and certainly not because these problems "caused" the transformation to modernity, but because the heart of modernity was formed in this transition. What is of the most importance here is the presumptions, and the problems, which we did not free ourselves of, despite the magnitude of change involved. While medieval solutions in the long run failed to hold, resulting in the disenchantment of the world, this disenchantment was far from any rejection of the

²⁶It should be obvious from this list that I do not subscribe to any theory that explains the weak position of teleological doctrine as due largely to either the empirical falsity of its claims or the "ideological" conditioning and manipulation perpetrated by today's societies. The first of these views ignores the unavoidable rooting of experiences of "empirical" reality in ontological assumptions, and neither of them shows enough respect for the ordinary participants of the medieval and modern worlds. It should also be clear that I am equally uninterested in the kind of explanation that privileges a particular category of social reality -- such as "ideas" or "economy" -- as first of all intelligible considered by itself and secondly as somehow primary in causing historical change. I follow Foucault in holding that there are always elements of the arbitrary and the multiple at work in any historical transformation. Several changes come together, perhaps, and are taken advantage of, transformed, and put the service of something else.

assumption of concord. It meant rather its transformation, into, among other things, new tools of normalization. It also meant, as we shall see, the rise of the figure of the private nuclear family as a compelling image of harmony.

Both Bennett and Connolly, informed by Hegel's conception of modernity and Hans Blumenberg's historical work, argue that teleological doctrines were not simply repudiated, as in some act of hubris that could be repented, nor were they lost in the popularity of new ideas of human independence or power, "...they rather came unraveled by the very attempts in the late medieval and early modern eras to perfect them."²⁷ This could happen because, first of all, "strong" teleological doctrines (such as robust faith) are, Bennett tells us, inherently precarious as modes of consciousness. "...the will to believe in resemblances coexists with the suspicion that the truth of things may not be so comforting."²⁸ Secondly, late medieval thought dealt with this problem in a way that fatally undermined its own premises and paved the way for modernity. This, at least, is the argument of

²⁷Connolly, Politics and Ambiguity, p. 135. See also Bennett, Unthinking Faith and Enlightenment, pp. 18-21, Blumenberg, The Legitimacy of the Modern Age (Cambridge, MIT Press, 1983), and, Charles Taylor, Hegel, Chapter II, pp. 51-75 and Chapter XX, pp. 537-571.

²⁸Unthinking Faith and Enlightenment, p. 18.

Blumenberg that Bennett and Connolly accept, and it goes a long way toward making sense of modernity as a new response to the older problem I mentioned earlier: homesickness.

Hegel sees the problem of modernity as the need to accommodate and give full due to the modern commitment to the reflective self (capable of individual freedom and entitled to individual rights) while at the same provide a world in which that self can be truly at home. It is not for nothing that Neitzsche called German philosophy the most fundamental form of homesickness, as Hegel sought to restore, at a new self-conscious and less immediate level, what he believed succumbed to the "enlightenment" movement due to the contradictions in its medieval version: an experience of oneness between faith and reason, autonomy and belonging, self and world, consciousness and culture, humans and nature.²⁹

The threat to the medieval world view, Blumenberg tells us, was always the problem of evil.³⁰ How could God allow evil to be? The onset of modernity is marked, in this view, by the victory of the nominalist solution to this problem over the Augustinian. Whereas Augustine explains evil as the work of humans, who were given free will by

²⁹Taylor, Hegel, p. 65.

³⁰The Legitimacy of the Modern Age, p. 130.

God, nominalism simply says that humans cannot understand why evil exists because divine will is absolute and incomprehensible to humans. The first view has the problem of positing an all-powerful God who nonetheless could not make a free human being without evil. The second view saves the power of God, but in a way that removes his immediate presence in the forms of signs to be read. Modernity, the argument goes, is marked by an experience of God as more distant and of nature as more alien; the experience of homesickness, to which robust faith had been a response, was forcefully reinvigorated by the rise in a nominalist outlook. The enlightenment conception of the world in terms of need and desire, as something to be mastered, was, by this view, the response which carried the day. Bennett puts it this way.

In an indifferent world, homesickness returned. One response to this existential uncertainty was the attempt to master and control a nature conceived as "matter."³¹

This change in its turn entailed a new centrality for the category of the human self. The self came to be seen not so much as an expression of God's will who has been given its own will after God's image, but as the source of all active will and purpose. God is in the modern scheme of things reduced to the role of the original creator, and

³¹Bennett, Unthinking Faith and Enlightenment, p. 20.

is perhaps the forgiver as well, if he is believed in at all. While the idea of a harmony between self and world has by no means faded away, we have lost the presumption that it is already inscribed in the cosmos. Instead the assumption is likely to be that we can and ought to make this harmony ourselves, in an active process of both finding and defining our true selves. One way to understand this change is to say that the self has replaced God as the "subject," as, in other words, the point of reference for which the universe can be said to "exist." Taylor speaks of this change in the self in terms of its changed relation to nature. "The essential difference can perhaps be put this way: the modern subject is self-defining, where on previous views the subject is defined in relation to a cosmic order."³²

This idea of the self is of course exactly that, an idea. It is, however, also more than that. It is a reality of subjects who are striving for self-consciousness, who understand themselves as free only if they endorse upon reflection all the restraints that apply to them, and who by virtue of this are subjected to a host of juridical and disciplinary mechanisms that enforce the

³²Hegel, p. 6. See also Connolly's and Bennett's characterization of the transition to modernity as a new relation of self and nature. Connolly, Politics and Ambiguity, pp. 129-130. Bennett, Unthinking Faith and Enlightenment, p. 7.

normal. The modern idea of the subject is, in other words, integral to the institutional order of modernity; and this order, while it grants a great deal to the self in the form of rights and powers, also demands a great deal in the way of self-discipline. The modern pursuit of self-consciousness is, by this view, the heavily enforced pursuit of concord; it is the normalizing (as well as liberating) demand that we integrate, deny, or eliminate any "Otherness" in us. It is enforced by a host of mechanisms: medical, economic, religious, familial, and otherwise. Both the best and worst of our modern forms of order are linked, then, to the pursuit of a concord of consciousness (symbolized wonderfully, perhaps, in the modern image of "the family" as a locus both of harmony and of benevolent discipline). This duality of implication becomes clearer, I think, when considered in the light of some of the paradigmatic features of modern orders, as identified by Connolly.

Modernity and Self-consciousness

Connolly points out that the standard for authority in modern societies is endorsement by the rational self, rather than, say, access to the purposiveness of the world. Authorities refer for justification (oftentimes deceitfully of course) to the "rational consent of agents

who agree (or promise) to obey rules and officials installed according to the proper procedures."³³ This idea of authority is problematic, even though compelling in many ways, as any given instance of "consent" can always be shown to fail to live up to this standard. In fact, "The enlightened, rational character of obedience through consent also locates irrational dimensions of authority in the depth psychology of the consenting adult."³⁴ By modern standards, then, modern forms of authority through consent are dangerous. People will at times oppose authority when they ought not to, just as at times they will interpret their own coercion as the exercise of proper authority, in order to see themselves as free. In modernity the status of the inner psychology of persons becomes valorized in new ways; it becomes central to questions of freedom and political power.

Modern societies are also characterized by the "conventionalization" of social life. The presumption in favor of existing social customs is weakened, as their authority comes to depend on the possibility of their discursive justification by those participating in them. Like the modern idea of authority on which it depends,

³³Connolly, Politics and Ambiguity, p. 130.

³⁴Connolly, Politics and Ambiguity, p. 132.

conventionalization gives a new political importance to the internal mental condition of society's participants.

After the withdrawal of purpose from the world, after the corollary accentuation of human will and agency, social customs take on a new coloration. They become conventions that are, directly or indirectly, the product of individual and collective will. They are therefore understood to be revisable through willful action and to be hateful forms of constraint and imposition when they do not correspond to the will of those living by them.³⁵

Third, and this follows from what has just been said, modernity is future oriented. Authority requires support not so much from the belief in the authenticity of certain accounts of the past as from a shared faith that "obedience to a set of procedures, norms, and authorities today will help to foster the sort of world we want for ourselves or progeny tomorrow."³⁶ This brand of authority is "fragile," in the sense that its ability to defend itself as in accordance with rational will depends to a great extent on the anticipated results of its exercise. Modern authority is, in other words, more potentially accountable than its historical precursor.

These three related features of modernity are certainly at the heart of its greatest achievements and its most favorable possibilities, but the way I have characterized

³⁵Connolly, Politics and Ambiguity, pp. 130-131.

³⁶Connolly, Politics and Ambiguity, p. 131.

them points already to their down side as well. We can explore this ambiguity of effects by reviewing Bennett's characterization of the conventionalization of social life as "thematization," which, she says, "permeates modern life."³⁷ We of modernity are, by this argument, particularly driven to give intelligible form -- in conception, category and theory -- to all of the liquidity of experience. Conventionalization means a potentially never-ending process of inquisition and categorization.

On the one hand, thematization is an achievement. To thematize is to politicize; we become aware of the human made character of categories, beliefs, roles, and social forms, thus "admirably enhancing the possibility of social change."³⁸ On the other hand, to thematize is to categorially delineate a world, and this -- from the point of view of discordance -- is to impose form on material not perfectly designed to receive it. Modern thematization is the aggressive categorization of the world.

Thematization enlightens and politicizes, extending the realm of conscious human management; at the same time, thematization enlightens and subjugates, torturing the space for the unmanageable.³⁹

³⁷Unthinking Faith and Enlightenment, p. 142.

³⁸Unthinking Faith and Enlightenment, p. 143.

³⁹Bennett, Unthinking Faith and Enlightenment, p. 145.

The idea is that thematization involves subjugation through normalization. "Thematization turns difference into deviance, and that is its truly black effect."⁴⁰ This idea is at the heart of Foucault's critique of the modern pursuit of self-consciousness. Foucault, more than any other thinker, has relentlessly advanced the thesis that there is an insidious form of entrapment involved in the pursuit of an order based on a freely held consensus. He in other words criticizes modernity at the level of its (our) quest for legitimacy; in seeking a legitimate order we participate in the process whereby all are hammered into a shape that suits the order. Some of us are made into those who endorse the order, while others are constructed as objects of treatment and as counter-examples for the first group. Every consensus has its Other, whether embodied in specific individuals designated as lacking in some way, or located inside each of us as the rumblings of dissent and discomfort which we root out and reform. Modern ideals of a society based on consensus hide the violence which is necessarily a part of any such concord.

⁴⁰Bennett, Unthinking Faith and Enlightenment, p. 146.

Modern Institutions and Normalization

This idea, that the same kind of self-consciousness that brings us modern conceptions of democracy and individual rights also provides a powerful impetus to forces of normalization, becomes more plausible when one considers a fourth important feature of modern societies identified by Connolly. This is that imperatives of social coordination have, for a variety of reasons, become more complicated and pressing. We are encouraged, and sometimes impelled, towards such coordination by the very structures -- physical and discursive -- that provide the context within we as individuals make our way. This happens even as the fragility of authority has in theory put any putative architects of the regulation of individual activity on the defensive.

By social coordination I mean the management of individuals regarding all or any facets of their activity -- where they live, how they look at life, what they are good at, what they believe in, what manners they have, how they are divided into groups, what family means for them, how they account for their problems, etc. The modern world depends more and more on the problematic exercise of such management. Normalization is not only made necessary by our complex interdependence, it is provided with the perfect pretext as well. Norms work with manipulation,

incentives, and coercion to encourage, shore up, and sometimes simply substitute for the consent needed for the exercise of authority.

...some of the same elements that render authority fragile generate authoritarian modes of social control. For whenever a disruption is highly successful in unsettling established transactions, our very interdependency--the very lack of self-sufficiency in modern life--generates public consent (and sometimes urgent demands) to restore the smooth operation of the order by coercive means.⁴¹

When I speak of a growing need for social coordination I refer especially to the patterns of production and consumption which tie us to imperatives of growth (meaning by "growth" the continual increase of production and income levels).⁴² To summarize, these imperatives propel

⁴¹Connolly, Politics and Ambiguity, p. 134.

⁴²Drawing on the work of André Gorz, Marshall Sahlins, and Fred Hirsch, Michael Best and Connolly have developed the idea that the forms of consumption permitted or encouraged in the U.S. put citizens on a treadmill where only the promise of continual growth in income stands a chance of maintaining their allegiance to the order. The prevailing alternatives in transportation, housing, food growth, purchasing and storage, education, and other realms of consumption force most people to continually pursue an elusive affluence. They can never make ends meet without difficulty, no matter how much "richer" they become. Instead they find that the luxuries and vehicles to success of one day are turned into unliberating necessities the next -- cars and B.A. degrees are examples. This system of consumption, it is further argued, cannot be transformed without corollary changes in other institutions such as the organization of work. See Best and Connolly, The Politicized Economy, Second Edition (D.C. Heath and Company, 1982), pp. 5-7 and throughout; Connolly, Politics and Ambiguity, p. 27-30; Gorz, A Strategy for Labor (Boston: Beacon Press, 1967), p. 11; Gorz, Socialism and Revolution (Garden City: Anchor Books, 1973); Sahlins, Culture and Practical Reason (University of Chicago Press, 1976); and Hirsch, The Social Limits to

us in the direction of greater normalization in two ways. They do so directly because, from the point of view of the pursuit of growth, certain disciplines and particular orientations are required, such as the prioritizing of investment, the acceptance of class difference as the only rational incentive system, the placement of a variety of growth-threatening causes on the back burner (e.g., environmental and health concerns), and the imposition of hardship on service workers, welfare recipients, single mothers, and others.⁴³ Our institutions push us to view upward mobility, marriage, and self-support as normal -- as appropriate models for behavior -- even as many of us do no fit into these models very well.

Imperatives of growth also promote normalization indirectly as they generate disaffection and resistance from the promises around which modern institutions are constructed. While the modern pursuit of growth has been justified largely by the promise of the universalization of affluence and the possibility of democracy, today it seems to require of us that we drop or amend both of these

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Growth (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1977).

⁴³The proponents of "reindustrialization," recognizing these imperatives and uncritically embracing them, are at the forefront of calls to reinforce the "traditional moralities" of, in George Gilder's words, "work, family, and faith." Wealth and Poverty (Bantam Books, 1981), p. 94.

goals. Disaffection from the order of growth is, however, often expressed and even experienced only covertly, because of both the absence of credible alternatives and the strong desire of reflective subjects to see themselves as free. Individuals sometimes, even as they evade taxes, commit crimes, and opt out of political life in every way, condemn overt expressions of resistance such as protests and radical political arguments because these are found to be threatening to the future which they are trying to hold onto, and which they have already "freely" committed themselves to. The growth of disaffection and resistance leads, under conditions of tight structural limits on the possible, to counter-movements of surveillance, disciplinary action, "values" campaigns, "public service announcements," etc.

To pursue growth as an unambiguously good thing is, of course, to participate in a kind of ontology of concord. While there are probably few people today that unhesitatingly endorse growth in this way, the imperatives of growth help tie us to philosophies of concord nonetheless. This is because these imperatives, through their reduction of "slack" (space for unthematized or unmanaged difference) in the order, tend to intensify the experience of homesickness which first made the enlightenment view of the world as matter to be mastered

so appealing. It is, after all, not easy to live with the judgment that one's civilization is on a course which one neither endorses nor can alter for the better. This situation provides excellent conditions for the extension of mechanisms of social discipline.⁴⁴

As the credibility of the old economic dream recedes and as no new sense of a common future emerges to replace it, ordinary people create a variety of private strategies to secure a semblance of personal meaning and dignity in these new circumstances. Meanwhile elites strive to find new ways to impose new disciplines and limits on these ordinary people. We are thus witnessing the simultaneous emergence of an underground economy and an underground culture of civic disaffection in some circles and the introduction of new means of social control and ideological management of hope in others.⁴⁵

All this suggests that, as long as we cannot relax the imperatives of growth governing our societies, we can look forward to continued and increasing economic disparity,

⁴⁴I hope it is clear that I do not contend that the development of a variety of practices that inculcate and enforce norms is caused simply by the fact that any social custom is, in modern times, subject to challenge. To explain the role of reflexivity in today's normalization it is necessary to refer to institutional structures with their tendencies, direction, and imperatives. Reflexivity will never be an entirely innocent, liberating affair, but I am not "opposed" to it (quite the opposite). Nor, on the other hand, am I claiming that the normalization we see around is an entirely necessary set of practices given our economic arrangements. It is only that the hand of normalization is enabled and to a degree forced by those modern institutional imperatives, set in motion by enlightenment ideas, which make the continued operation of society such a daunting task.

⁴⁵Politics and Ambiguity, pp. 33-34.

greater reliance on manufactured consensus, a more and more far reaching demand for civic virtue, a large degree of mostly covert resistance, and more and more surveillance and discipline (exercised, as we shall see, with the help of the institution of family).

Normalization and Discourse

I still have not spoken directly of how it is that normalization proceeds. Foucault speaks to this question. By his reading, the last several centuries have seen the growth in the reach and social importance of "positive" techniques of power -- powers "organized around the management of life rather than the menace of death."⁴⁶ The new "bio-power" is based both on the active disciplining of individual bodies and the social regulation of a newly conceived entity -- the "population."

What makes power hold good, what makes it accepted, is simply that fact that it doesn't only weigh on us as a force that says no, but that it traverses and produces things, it induces pleasure, forms knowledge, produces discourse. It needs to be considered as a productive network that runs through the whole social body.⁴⁷

⁴⁶The History of Sexuality, Vol. 1, An Introduction, trans. by Robert Hurley (New York: Vintage Books, 1980), p. 147.

⁴⁷The History of Sexuality, p. 119.

This productive network consists of a whole series of more or less infinitesimal mechanisms "which each have their own history, their own trajectory."⁴⁸ These mechanisms, which include architecture, social rites, documentation of people's lives, commonly held meanings and expectations, and official and unofficial forms of punishment, assistance, correction, treatment, and advice, are "positive" in that they work to produce individuals as particular forms of selves. Foucault, then, points out that social management is by no means simply the application of rules and incentives; it also is the means by which people are made to construct themselves along the lines of certain dichotomies, such as sexuality and deviance, sanity and insanity, responsibility and criminality, and sickness and health. People are deployed, in other words, within categories of the normal and the deviant, usually seeking to put themselves at the pole of the former, which is associated with truth, reason, knowledge and liberation.

Language, as an ordering of the world which carries and imposes meanings and interpretations of reality, and which inserts its understandings into the design and practice of most all human construction and activity, is not merely

⁴⁸"Two Lectures," Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972-1977 (New York: Pantheon Books, 1972), p. 99.

one more mechanism of normalization; it is central to its means of operation. How we speak helps to make us what we are.⁴⁹ Foucault, cognizant of this fact, examines the ways that various disciplines of the self, such as psychiatry, penology, and therapy, have as their aim the production of the appropriately revealing discourse. He shows how the techniques of these disciplines increasingly inform the practices of a variety of social practices, rules, and structures. The point, he says, is in each case to get people to speak, to individualize themselves, bare the truth about themselves, defend themselves, find their inner coherence, etc. And, indeed, this is a common feature of job and loan interviews, questionnaires, job application forms, drug treatment programs, welfare checkups, self-help courses, therapy sessions, parole board reviews, family court hearings, alternative community group meetings, and problem resolution sessions between lovers. We are, as Foucault says, a "confessional" society.

⁴⁹Foucault's various histories seek to document how the imposition and elicitation of discourse is complicit in this process of normalization. See Madness and Civilization, Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison (Random House, 1979), The Birth of the Clinic: An Archeology of Medical Perception (Random House, 1975), The History of Sexuality, and The Use of Pleasure: The History of Sexuality, Volume Two (Random House, 1986).

To sum up, we are, by this reading of society, each pressed in numerous ways to form a narrative vision of ourselves and to stick fast to this identity as the condition of our freedom. This has an effect (sometimes) of normalization because the ways we come to see ourselves and the commitments we make as responsible selves can amount to the acceptance of the prevailing alternatives for the organization of the self.

One way to understand normalization is to compare it to "oppression," the latter implying a form of power that holds down and prevents, which in other words is unjustifiable because it keeps people from something they need or would be better off having. Normalization operates through mechanisms which create and direct, rather than merely prevent. The implication is that such power is unjustifiable insofar as it unnecessarily reduces slack in the order, if it participates, in other words, in an unnecessary and hurtful privileging of certain individuals, certain powers for individuals, or certain ways of being.

These different conceptions -- power as oppression and power as normalization -- are at odds in certain respects, but the philosophy of discordance does not, at least by the reading I endorse, rule out the possibility of oppression. People can be, and often are, "held down" in

that they have real needs and legitimate desires which are inadequately addressed and could be better addressed. The philosophy of discordance only disallows an interpretation of a particular set of needs and desires as the "authentic," "truly fulfilling," or "true" ones. To so privilege is to pave the way (at least theoretically) for normalization, as the positive production of the needs and desires thought to be part of the true self will be disguised. The project of the "liberation" of our "true selves" can in fact come to serve the ends of an established order.

One example of this process is of great relevance to the question of the effects of the modern institution of family; this is the "deployment of sexuality," as traced by Foucault. I will speak more of this in the next chapter, which concerns normalization and the family. But a few words about it now might help in the present discussion. As a form of "bio-power," the deployment of sexuality is concerned not so much with rules as with knowledge. "Sexuality" is not, says Foucault, a substratum or drive which can either be held down by rules and force or liberated and allowed to flourish. It is instead a modern construct -- "it has been expanding at an increasing rate since the seventeenth century."⁵⁰ It has

⁵⁰The History of Sexuality, Vol. 1, p. 107.

been constructed, says Foucault, by means of the eliciting of discourse -- people are asked or forced to speak of their sexuality -- and by the construction of special knowledges of sex. These knowledges are based on the interpretation by authorities of the speaking of the sexual subject.

"Sexuality" is, Foucault tells us, able to function to make people speak first of all because of its status as a truth to be discovered. It also serves to make people talk because of the panoply of legal, medical and therapeutic practices which assume the truth of sexuality in their operations. On the one hand a certain pleasure is involved in the "discovery" (construction) of our own sexual "truth." Sexual "liberation" generates (and appeals to) feelings of power for the individual. On the other hand this "liberation" is an imposition of a unity upon the multiple pleasures of the desiring body.⁵¹ This imposition takes place in the context of the reality of therapeutic discipline. To fall outside the bodily norms (perhaps to be "gay," "hermaphroditic," a "dwarf," etc.) is to be subjected to exploitative and therapeutic treatment.⁵²

⁵¹Foucault, The History of Sexuality, Vol. I, pp. 152-153.

⁵²See Herculine Barbin: Being the Recently Discovered Memoirs of a Nineteenth Century French Hermaphrodite, Introduced by Michel Foucault, Translated by Richard McDougall (Pantheon Books, 1980).

It is hard, perhaps impossible, to finally differentiate between those aspects of ourselves which we create through our thinking and speaking and those which are somehow there "to begin with." I don't think that this fact puts any dents in Foucault's thesis, as his point is the importance we attach to this difference and the effects on ourselves of our searches for the truth. On the other hand, perhaps Foucault is wrong (I don't think so) and "sexuality" is an underlying unity. Even so, our society's emphasis on the meaningfulness of the experience of this unity (the great joy of having sex, the importance of having a sexual identity) can still be said to constitute a normalizing force. "Sexuality" promotes the idea of a concord within the self and between self and world. It stands as just one example of an underlying unity. It is part of a world that tells us constantly of the importance of discovering just who and what we truly are. And this perhaps promotes the idea that there are incontestable truths around which we can perhaps one day organize a world with no politics. If so, it follows that the deployment of sexuality produces homesickness (especially under modern conditions). As such, it likely helps to maintain our commitment to the imperatives of growth which so govern our orders.

Foucault would be the first to agree that social "disciplines" -- meaning by this social practices which

construct, and so "tame," the self to a degree -- are not new. By his reading, however, today's disciplines have a broader and deeper reach than in previous times, meaning that they result in a more thorough-going construction of the self and they apply across more areas of life. The techniques of modern disciplines are, moreover, by his reading especially reliant on reflexivity. At the same point in history as new levels of self-conscious reflection have made possible new heights of critical reassessment and therefore allowed for new conceptions of freedom, this self-conscious reflection has been put to use -- not necessarily consciously -- as a means of social control. Modernity means, for Foucault, the advent of "disciplinary society." Connolly summarizes Foucault well:

The normalized self is, for Foucault, the self that maintains self-surveillance to avoid treatment for delinquency, mental illness, or sexual perversity; disciplinary society is the order that extends strategies of normalization into new frontiers of social life."⁵³

The Ontology of Discordance Revisited

Most contemporary political theories are, as I already have indicated, insufficiently aware of (or complicit with) the problem of the production of homesickness and

⁵³Politics and Ambiguity, p. 104.

normalized selves.⁵⁴ Discordance distinguishes itself from most of today's political programs in its insistence always in acknowledging the injury done by any set of norms; it could therefore possibly provide (if it could be the basis of a political program) the philosophical grounding for the taming of the imperatives which make us depend so heavily on norms. It is, in Connolly's words, compatible with and affirming of a brand of democracy which idealizes politics and its strife as "part of the affirmation of life itself."⁵⁵

By some readings, to affirm democracy and politics is to amend Foucault's critique of the pursuit of freedom and legitimacy through self-consciousness. Whether this is the case depends on if Foucault is properly read as

⁵⁴"The issue between them is how normalization is to proceed," says Connolly. Politics and Ambiguity, p. 10. I have already mentioned George Gilder's offer of "work, family, and faith" as the appropriate set of norms to follow. Other cultural principles that can serve as the basis for normalization include the pursuit of consensus, the rejection of materialism, and the libertarian repudiation of any notion of the common good. An ontology of discordance does not claim that these principles are all equally valid or invalid -- reasons can (and should) be given in support of some over others.

⁵⁵Politics and Ambiguity, p. 14. Connolly says that his affirmation of democratic politics as the medium through which "voices of otherness can find expression" (Politics and Ambiguity, p. 15) constitutes a step away from Foucault and Nietzsche, the former being ambivalent regarding democracy and the latter considering it the triumph of the resentful and concord-seeking "herd mentality" (see Politics and Ambiguity, p. 14).

rejecting all affirmation as necessarily normalizing. Certainly he is clear when he says that "to imagine another system is to participate in the present system."⁵⁶ Some go so far as to say that Foucault's relentless politicization amounts to a nihilistic anti-politics which is helpless to offer any sort of response to the normalization of modern bio-power. More specifically, Foucault is said to rule out the possibility of any legitimate normative commitment to a politics of change.⁵⁷ I am not convinced by this reading; it seems to falsely encapsulate Foucault, perhaps for the sake of purchasing a clear reading of his "overall position." Foucault, I think, is committed simply to consistently playing the role of the nay-sayer to all our affirmations.⁵⁸ Connolly

⁵⁶Language, Counter-memory, Practice (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1977), p. 230.

⁵⁷Varieties of this argument are offered by Charles Taylor, "Foucault on Freedom and Truth," Political Theory 12, no. 2 (May 1984), pp. 152-183, Jürgen Habermas, "The Genealogical Writing of History: On Some Aporias in Foucault's Theory of Power," trans. by Gregory Ostrander, Canadian Journal of Social and Political Theory 10, no. 1-2 (1986), pp. 1-9, and Nancy Fraser, "Foucault on Modern Power: Empirical Insights and Normative Confusions," Praxis International 1, no. 3 (October 1981), pp. 272-287; "Michel Foucault: A Young 'Conservative'?" Ethics 96, no. 1 (October 1985), pp. 165-184. A summary of these positions and a defense of Foucault is offered by Tom Keenan in "The Paradox of Knowledge and Power: Reading Foucault on a Bias," Political Theory 15, no. 1 (February 1987), pp. 5-37.

⁵⁸As Connolly puts it, Foucault prefers to play "the fool" for modernity. He offers the theorist of legitimacy a "double," a persistent voice of criticism. Politics and Ambiguity, p. 92.

argues that even if Foucault excludes political affirmation for strategic reasons his critique of reflexive self-consciousness does not in fact rule out such affirmation. It only rules out the possibility of unqualified affirmation. "...the need remains to establish a stance, even if it is an ambiguous one, towards those limits most deserving of allegiance."⁵⁹

There is no need for me here to enter into the debate about what Foucault's position on this issue really is. I believe, following Connolly's lead, that space does exist in the order for the worthwhile pursuit of political legitimacy; the challenge is to make this pursuit part of a politics of the taming of normalization rather than of its promotion. Towards this end, we need a politics based on "a mode of reflexivity which ...acknowledges the limits to the reflexive assimilation of the other ..."

Such a view ...supports, I want to say, an ideal of social order which can sustain itself without having to draw so much of the order into the orbit of social control.⁶⁰

A world such as this, in which the ambiguous, and so contestable and political, nature of even our highest achievements is recognized, is not easy to imagine. It would mean forms of speaking, modes of punishment, types

⁵⁹Politics and Ambiguity, pp. 93-94.

⁶⁰Connolly, Politics and Ambiguity, p. 94.

of social assistance, and perhaps rituals of acknowledgement which call attention to the harm done by social categories and arrangements. And it would require the loosening of the grip of those imperatives of coordination which make the exercise of slack in the application of social categories too threatening to order itself. Such a future may however present the only credible alternative to a possible future of greater disparity, new impositions, the extension of normalization, and considerable hatred, resentment, fear, and victimization for the sake of order.

The transformation to a world of greater slack would not require the wholesale rejection of prevailing commitments and practices, but rather a selective reformulation of our commitments in the light of discordance. Nor would a culture of discordance mean the end of norms. To say that norms could disappear or become benign would be to assume again the possibility of harmony. If there can be no final or cost free harmony, if "the social order is understood as a precarious and dangerous achievement," then human life is, as I said before, inherently "political."⁶¹ In keeping with this conclusion, a culture of discordance does not reject authority, even as it insists on the fact that every mode of authority brings

⁶¹Bennett, Unthinking Faith and Enlightenment, p. 153.

losses and sacrifices to those that accept it, because authority is necessary if any prized mode of social life is to exist.⁶²

An ontology of discordance does not, finally, disallow us from making arguments based on claims concerning "the natural," even though it does, importantly, challenge the idea that whatever is "natural" is unambiguously good, inevitably compelling, or entirely consistent and unified in its urgings. It is not inconsistent with discordance to say that humans are embodied and situated in the world in ways that both enable and constrain. The point of view of discordance can, in Bennett's words, "appreciate the natural and bodily world as an ambiguous setting in which we reside, as both a medium and an impediment to human fulfillment, as successively host and adversary."⁶³

Discordance and the Family

The issue of the natural provides me with the perfect opportunity to turn this discussion to the question of family. From Plato and Aristotle on, most political theory has seen the family either as an obstacle to, or as an unambiguously good and necessary building block in, the achievement of a natural harmony within and among selves,

⁶²See Connolly, Politics and Ambiguity, pp. 136-139.

⁶³Unthinking Faith and Enlightenment, p. 151.

but family, like social order, is a precarious, dangerous, and necessarily hurtful achievement. Family, again like social order, is a social institution (a product of convention) which nonetheless "partakes" of the natural. Defenses of "the" family as natural are typically conservative in their import. From the point of view of discordance, however, it is possible to see a radical moment in the defense of families as rooted partly in what is naturally the human condition. To state this in the form of a thesis, our character as embodied beings requiring completion (always imperfect and subjugating) through the formation of identities, makes plausible (if contestable) the defense of the small, relatively intimate and stable household as a component of a social form worth having, at least under modern conditions.

I divide this thesis into two separate claims. First, the institution of family plays a central role in the construction of individuals as subjugated selves. Second, we nonetheless ought to affirm, as deserving of our allegiance, some limits and norms concerning the demarcation of a relatively private realm and concerning the upbringing of children. Specifically, I argue that any sort of less normalizing and oppressive order which we might be able to achieve will include something which is like, but also different than, today's family.

I elaborate on this dual thesis in the chapters ahead, but I will now briefly summarize each of its parts. The idea is that, on the one hand, the political role of the family, here meaning by this term an institution and a set of ideas current in modern societies, is largely, although ambiguously, that of a support for the forces of normalization which keep most of us committed to the ends around which our institutions are constructed. The family as a principle around which most people's living arrangements are organized is a site for the focus of never to be realized hopes of concord and a fertile ground for the application of a variety of normalizing interventions. And as an ideal the family serves as a model of concord which invites either a depoliticizing sort of despair and grievance, a sense of satisfaction based on the privatization of ends and the cultivation of naiveté regarding the historical course we are on, or a revolutionary commitment to make the larger society over into a more "familial" place, or some combination of all three. Regardless of which of these positions people are drawn to, the notion of family functions to prop up concordance and so helps to sustain the dangerous growth of the imperatives of social coordination which are so conducive to normalization in the first place. And in the meantime the interpretation of the nature and importance

of kin ties through the lens of an ontology of concordance acts to help sustain the still near universal second-class status of women and women's activities relative to men and men's activities.

On the other hand, it is also true that the institution of family, meaning specifically the common practice whereby a small and relatively stable and intimate group of adults combine residence with the raising of children, ought to be defended as a achievement which, however precarious and dangerous, is nonetheless necessary to some of the ends we rightfully prize. It is for example a locus of much that people experience as worthwhile or even deeply satisfying. I maintain, in other words, that there is a way to defend the family from the point of view of discordance, and I believe that this defense can provide a beginning to a counter to the forces of normalization that surround us, as well as to the assumptions of concord and the institutions of growth that supports those forces.

The first part of my thesis, that the family normalizes, is the subject of the next chapter. In chapter four I discuss the family from the point of view of discordance, drawing both genealogical and psychoanalytic perspectives. In between, in chapter three, I review some of the much and varied theoretical discourse on the western family, in order to make the case that concordance is assumed by a wide variety of points of view.

CHAPTER 3

THE CONTEMPORARY FAMILY: OPPRESSION, NORMALIZATION, AND THE NATURAL

In this chapter I am concerned with deconstructing and criticizing today's family, rather than with defending it. I nonetheless end up doing some of both, as the power of the family to do harm stems in part from the good that it offers. This at any rate is the conclusion I reach after addressing the following questions. What deleterious and unjust features of our society (I mean the modern west and especially the United States) does its institution of family participate in? In other words, what harm does the family do? Given this harm, what explains the tremendous appeal and moral force of the image of "the family"? In other words, how is the contemporary reality of family (image and practice) constituted and enforced? I should say at the outset that I do not provide here any kind of adequate description or a documentation either of the harm done by and through the family or of the technologies of its enforcement. Instead I offer an account of them which is consistent with the ontology of discordance.

This means, of course, that my critique of the family connects to the account of modernity I give in the preceding chapter. I am concerned to make plausible the idea that there is a link between our family institution and today's lack, on the one hand, of "public" spaces of action, accountability, and the expression of the different and the unsettled, and, on the other hand, of "private" spaces which allow for unmanaged, incompletely enunciated, or non-hierarchized differences to exist. On the other hand, I want to make this case without denying that families do to some degree (and in a changed world could to a greater degree) operate in the opposite direction, and help give life and value to some unrealized public and private possibilities of our human existence.

The Contemporary Family

The institution of the private family is a central figure in the structuring of modern, western societies; it is central both in its capacity as an image that circulates and its reality as the typical basis by which people participate in economic and social life.¹ Ranya

¹See Michèle Barrett and Mary McIntosh, The Anti-social Family (New Left Books, 1982), pp. 7-8. Barrett and McIntosh consider the family's reality as image to be "the family as an ideology." To me this wording falsely implies that such images would necessarily go away in a society without class oppression.

Rapp clarifies this dual aspect of the meaning of "family" by distinguishing between families and households.

Households are the empirically measurable units within people pool resources and perform certain tasks... They are residential units within which personnel and resources get distributed and connected.²

Family, on the other hand, is as Rapp points out a normative model with which people are recruited into households. "The family" refers first to the "nuclear" kin relations which are held up as the proper model for the formation of households (mom, dad, and the kids), and second to the more extended ties which, while presumed to be emotionally significant, people are permitted to "activate selectively."³ This normative model, finally, includes a particular vision of sexuality and of gender. The only sexuality in the normative household is legally sanctioned heterosexuality, and "mom" and "dad," as the compatible and jointly required genders of parenthood, each have their own special characteristics, so clearly marked by the differences between mother's day and father's day.

Some aspects of this model of the family are today being called into question as never before, but the model is

²"Family and Class in Contemporary America: Notes Toward an Understanding of Ideology," Rethinking the Family: Some Feminist Questions, Barrie Thorne with Marilyn Yalom, Eds. (New York: Longman, 1982), p. 169-170.

³See Rapp, "Family and Class," p. 170.

still very much alive and well.⁴ There are now several television situation comedies which tell the story of an alternative type of household -- there are two "dads," or maybe a mom and a teenage helper. On the one hand the message is that these families are okay; there is love, the children are well cared for. On the other hand, the message is that the characters did not choose their different way of life; they are simply making the best of a regrettable situation. Thus the shows seem designed to reassure us about the resiliency of old ways despite social change.⁵

The nature of the normative family model, as well as the power behind it, is summed up beautifully in the results of and the reaction to an attempt by the Chicago Housing Authority to remove warring gangs from the 13 story Rockwell Gardens housing development. The authorities began to enforce Federal guidelines that only allow "families" to lease units. Specifically, all men living

⁴It has recently been challenged in a revolutionary decision by the New York State Court of Appeals, to the effect that, when it comes to rent control laws, any group characterized by a long-term exclusive commitment and the pooling of economic resources can legally be considered a "family." See The New York Times, July 7, 1989: A1 and B16.

⁵Two such shows are "My Two Dads" and "Charles in Charge." A notable exception to this trend is "The Tracey Ullman Show," which has regular skits about a gay couple and their daughter.

with a woman in her apartment without being married to her stood to be evicted. The result has been, on the one hand, control of gangs. On the other hand, numerous marriages suddenly took place. These marriages are, of course, coerced. One man who has hid in the apartment he lives in since the day of the raid said "It's been like prison." Despite this remark, the article in The New York Times which described these events is entirely upbeat, and so is the Housing Authority, which plans to continue the program elsewhere.

"It's exciting, isn't it?" a Chicago Housing Authority spokeswoman, Katie Kelly, said today. "Quite frankly, we hope the trend continues."⁶

Thus while we may have reached the point where the gender and marital status of the parents and caregivers is a legitimate subject of public debate, an important degree of orthodoxy does exist. According to this orthodoxy, marriage and family are something to celebrate. Moreover, in general "the family" is taken to mean a goods-consuming, child producing, child rearing, resource pooling, and property holding household which is based on nuclear kin ties, is fairly strictly segregated from work life and education, and is the center of privacy, love, and stability. In short, the family is marked out as the

⁶The New York Times, October 18, 1988, sec. I, p. 18, col. 1.

only proper place where children and adults can live together, as well as the most proper place for strong affection, intimacy and personal commitment.

This idea has replaced an earlier medieval one, by which the family referred more to the importance of "blood" ties in locating individuals and arranging social and economic life and less to a "home" where one could find privacy and affection. Earlier than that, in the Greece of Plato and Aristotle, "family" meant the producing and child-rearing household; it was articulated as the realm of necessity, without the normative status conferred by the medieval concern with "honor" or the modern concern with familial love. And, in societies further removed from us than our own past, it is misleading to speak at all of "the family." Thus, in some languages there is no word for the unit of parents and children, even though the speakers are clearly aware of which children are biologically related to which adults, and in other societies there is no living space common to the group of parents and children.⁷

⁷ This is pointed out by Jane Collier, Michelle Z. Rosaldo, and Sylvia Yanagisako, "Is There a Family? New Anthropological Views," Rethinking the Family: Some Feminist Questions, ed. by Barrie Thorne with Marilyn Yalom (Longman, 1982), p. 33. Regarding the lack of a term like our "family" in some languages, they refer to the work of Evon Z. Vogt, Zinacantan: A Mayan Community in the Highlands of Chiapas (Harvard University Press, 1969), p. 39. Regarding the point about a "family space," they refer to the work of Yolanda and Robert Murphy, Women of the Forest (Columbia University Press, 1974).

"Family" is, in part, a contrastive concept; it gets its meaning as much by what it supposedly is not as by what it supposedly is. The modern western family is situated among, and posited as a contrast to, the otherwise relatively contingent, often competitive and instrumental, and usually temporary relations of modern capitalist societies. "The family" is meant to contrast with the private world of friendship, with the semi-public world of "private" business and employment, and with the "public" world of government, politics, media, and entertainment.⁸ In contrast with the more voluntaristic and perhaps interest-based relationships that supposedly characterize these settings, the family refers to a group of special persons among whom obtain more demanding norms of accountability and responsibility, and among whom memories are shared that make the mutual relations extra ordinarily valuable and important. Relations in the family are supposed to go beyond the instrumental and the contingent, as well as beyond the level of sharing and commitment considered normal in friendships.

The separation of the family from other realms of social life such as work and politics is of course not just an idea but also a reality. The modern family came fully

⁸Collier, Rosaldo, and Yanagisako, "Is There a Family?" pp. 33-34.

into its own in the last century, as a result of the industrial revolution, and scholars widely agree on certain of its features.⁹ It could not exist in anything like its present form if there had been no decline in the amount of production and education carried out in the home.¹⁰ It is, as compared to the family of feudal times, more isolated from non-nuclear kin, servants (if they exist), and community knowledge and observation.¹¹ It has changed internally, both with regard to at least the form (if not necessarily the import) of power relations between

⁹For the structural-functionalist position, see Talcott Parsons, Social Structure and Personality (New York: Free Press, 1970), and Talcott Parsons and Robert F. Bales, Family, Socialization and Interaction Process (New York: Free Press, 1955). The classic Marxist text is perhaps Friedrich Engels, The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State (Chicago: Charles H. Kerr & Company, Cooperative, 1902). Two excellent feminist texts (which also include good overviews of the family history literature) are Louise Tilly and Joan Scott, Women, Work and Family (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1978), and Elizabeth H. Pleck, "Two Worlds in One: Work and Family," Journal of Social History (December 1976): 178-95. Other important works in the history of the family are Phillipe Ariès, Centuries of Childhood: A Social History of Family Life (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1962), and Edward Shorter, The Making of the Modern Family (New York: Basic Books, 1975).

¹⁰A good account of this transition in its early stages can be found in Ariès, Centuries of Childhood.

¹¹See John Demos, Past, Present, and Personal: The Family and the Life Course in American History (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), pp. 3-23. Regarding privacy in New England, see Nancy F. Cott, "Eighteenth-Century Family and Social Life Revealed in Massachusetts Divorce Records", In A Heritage of Her Own: Towards a New Social History of American Women, Nancy F. Cott and Elizabeth H. Pleck, eds. (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1979), p. 113.

men and women, and with regard to its physical set-up. On the one hand one's gender is no longer legally and explicitly determinative of one's rights and obligations, any more than one's membership in a particular family any longer invokes a set of rules about marriage and occupation. On the other hand, the household is now marked by corridors, rooms with functions, and furniture that stays in one place.¹² Along with the new attitude to privacy indicated by these changes, has come a new attitude toward children, who are now thought to be different than adults, even as better than adults, and as deserving of a great deal of special attention so that they develop properly.¹³

These truths help to distinguish the modern family from its western predecessor, but they leave many questions unanswered.¹⁴ What kind of autonomy, and what new forms

¹²Centuries of Childhood, pp. 394-403.

¹³This is Ariès' thesis in Centuries of Childhood. On privacy as a modern invention, see Hannah Arendt, The Human Condition (The University of Chicago Press, 1958), pp. 22-78.

¹⁴They can also lead to some serious misunderstandings. One should not jump to the conclusion that history has been a simple progression from large to small, or from a family based on material goods to one based on sentiment (I speak of this more in this next chapter). Peter Laslett calls this first idea a "myth," and points to the way this myth blinds us to contemporary realities. We lose sight of the important distinction between the family understood as the "co-resident domestic group" (household) and the family understood as a network of kinship. Just as we assume that the household was bigger and more materialistic in the past, we tend to assume that today the household and the family have become the same. There

of social regulation, come along with the apparently clear demarcation of the family as a separate space? What forces, for example, now determine "marriage choice" and occupation, and how is the family complicit with these forces? The modern family is thought of as initiated through voluntary romance and as separate and distinct from the world outside, and these ideas are a real feature of the institution, but this does not mean that they are true. It remains to be said how the modern family is regulated "from the outside." In my view the family is in part a product of social forces and in that sense hardly distinct from the "outside." To ask about social regulation is to ask about the ways that rights, obligations, and social expectations are established, if not by the rules and laws of honor and blood. I argue, following the lead of others, that they are established with the help of the notion of "the family" as a locus (and even as an ideal) of happiness. This occurs not in spite of but rather because of the fact that most of us don't live in "normative families." And, I also argue, the fact that this occurs means a good deal of harm can be

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is a "modern family," but within its bounds there is considerable variation. Laslett, "Introduction: The History of the Family," Household and Family in Past Time, ed. by Peter Laslett with the assistance of Richard Wall (Cambridge at the University Press, 1972), p. 1.

done to people that might otherwise not be done. I, like Rapp, understand the modern family as complicit with the propagation of norms which have a heavy cost for many.

The Price of the Contemporary Family

Because of the role played by the modern family in the secondary status of women, powerful descriptions of these costs can be found in feminist scholarship. In fact were it not for feminism, it is doubtful that there would be much at all by way of analysis and criticism of the modern family. Socialist feminists have been particularly insightful, although (as we shall see) these insights are often combined with some problematic assumptions typical to socialism.

On the insightful side, Rapp explains how the family operates as a norm of loving, worthwhile, voluntary relations in the context of a system of households which are differentiated by class. The result is the perpetuation of a variety of illusions central to both the continued acceptance of economies of private accumulation and the continuation of the hurt, disappointment, and suffering faced so often by people in their pursuit of worthwhile, voluntary relations.

To achieve a normative family is something many categories of Americans are prevented from doing because of the ways that their households plug into tenuous resource bases. And when normative families

are achieved, it is at substantial and differential costs to both men and women.¹⁵

Of particular force is Rapp's discussion of the way the family/household system links the pursuit of autonomy and love to the reproduction of dependence and class and gender inequality. Working class men and women typically look forward to the formation of their own family as somehow liberating -- "Founding a family is what people do for personal gratification, for love, and for autonomy."¹⁶ What people get instead is recruited as a member of a particular gender into a household situated in a particular class. They then need to do their required part in the family just to keep it going.

The norm of the family based household is, in other words, clung to as the only (and the approved) locus of the achievement of satisfying and meaningful personal relations. There is enough truth to this idea to keep it going, even as it has some terrible effects.¹⁷ As Rapp

¹⁵"Family and Class," p. 180.

¹⁶"Family and Class," p. 173.

¹⁷These effects are racist and sexist, as well as classist. I agree with Michael Harrington that teenage pregnancy among the poor (in some places occurring at epidemic levels) cannot be entirely explained by ignorance, lack of access to birth control, or even by the refusal of men to use birth control (certainly a factor). To refuse to countenance the possibility that young women sometimes allow themselves to get pregnant to try and court love and family autonomy is to give them too little credit. Poor teenage women are not stupid. They simply are in a much worse position than others when it comes to their chances of getting the romance and independence all

puts it, ties of family are often, at least among the poor and the near poor, "lifelines that simultaneously hold together and sustain individuals."¹⁸

On the other hand, real family experiences all too often belie the norm of loving, sharing, and protection, exploding instead with tension, rage and violence. While few families actually correspond to the norm of the secure and harmonious group of thoughtful yet apolitical heterosexuals who are concerned primarily with continued security, self-development and recreation, this gap between norm and reality leads usually to reflection on one's own inadequacies rather than on the inadequacies of the norm itself and its social and economic context.¹⁹ In

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of us are encouraged to pursue. Teenage pregnancy helps to firm up differences of social class because it reinforces stereotypes of the poor, while often keeping or making specific individuals poor and dependent. Moreover, since it is women who get pregnant, and because a disproportionate number of racial minorities are among the poor, teenage pregnancy has both racist and sexist results. Harrington, The New American Poverty, p. 196 and throughout.

¹⁸Jane Humphries speaks powerfully of the real importance of family ties to working class survival and resistance. "The Working-Class Family: A Marxist Perspective," The Family in Political Thought, ed. by Jean Bethke Elshtain (Amherst, Mass.: The University of Massachusetts Press, 1982).

¹⁹Even as of 1978 both parents worked in 50% of the two-parent families. And one out of six children at that time lived in a single-parent family. Boston Women's Health Book Collective, Ourselves and Our Children: A Book By and For Parents (New York: Random House, 1978), p. 160.

the (somewhat stilted) language of Jürgen Habermas, "familial-vocational privatism" is an important cultural bulwark of late capitalism.²⁰

Michèle Barrett and Mary McIntosh, authors of The Anti-social Family, discuss these several points quite succinctly. They point out that, when it comes to the maintenance of economic exploitation, families contribute directly as the basis of inheritance; they pass on not only resources but "advantage and disadvantage in the chances of educational success."²¹ The fact that people live in families also provides support for the myth that individualist and market forms of economic organization can adequately provide for all. This lie is sold, say Barrett and McIntosh, primarily by means of the equation of individualism and familism. The self-sufficient "individual" of mainstream economic thought is, for example, really a "provider" for a family, and the talk of society as composed of such individuals helps cover up the fact that many members of society cannot contribute to production and the wage system cannot actually meet the needs of all.²²

²⁰Legitimation Crisis (Boston: Beacon Press, 1973), p. 75.

²¹The Anti-social Family, p. 45.

²²The Anti-social Family, pp. 47-50.

This equation of individualism and familism operates in concert with other factors to do special harm to women. For example the concept works hand-in-hand with the structure of work -- the "family wage," gender based wage disparities, and gender based occupational distinctions -- to make it likely that women will be the ones to give up work and career and stay home to care for children.²³ Men, on the other hand, often have little choice but to spend little time with their children. Families simply cannot afford to do it another way.²⁴

The family is also currently implicated in the fact that women are more subject than men to isolation, risk of mental illness, mental anguish and physical abuse. This is because the ideal of family, along with the myriad of social expectations, laws, policies, and economic realities that support it, places women and men in different relations to public and private life. Barrett and McIntosh point out for example that men, "more fully located in the public sphere," are more likely to be convicted of a crime, while women, trapped in solitary and unrelieved household responsibilities, are more likely to be diagnosed as mentally ill.²⁵

²³Harrington, The New American Poverty, pp. 196-197.

²⁴Ourselves and Our Children, pp. 190-191.

²⁵The Anti-social Family, pp. 58-59.

The contemporary family also helps to enforce limitations and impose expectations with regard to people's sexual identity and activities. This is particularly hard on women, despite many changes for the better in the recent past.²⁶ The bulk of society is divided into married couples, and this gives a tangible basis to the pressure the family ideal exerts on everyone to be married. Marriage of course is typically an economic arrangement as well as a sexual and a romantic one, with women being in a more financially dependent situation.²⁷ What this adds up to is obstacles to alternative arrangements of sexual, intimate, and financial life, as well as the reinforcement of the pressure on women to be adequate sexual objects for men.²⁸

The costs of our family system are, of course, also born by children. One book reviewer, after speaking of the

²⁶For a list of the benefits of "the sex reform movement" see The Anti-social Family, p. 73.

²⁷The Anti-social Family, pp. 54-55. Following Engels, Barrett and McIntosh conclude that sex-love must be separated from economic ties and "allowed to flourish in its own right." As I have already indicated, I'm not sure that sexuality "in its own right" exists. See The Anti-social Family, p. 75, and Friedrich Engels, The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State (Chicago, Charles H. Kerr & Co., Cooperative, 1902), pp. 91-92.

²⁸Barrett and McIntosh say that sex still takes place primarily "on men's terms," and this in indeed one way to put it, although I am uncomfortable with the way this phrase reifies "men" and their "terms" (The Anti-social Family, p. 74).

widespread sexual abuse of children, often by family members, added that "Countless children are beaten, starved, isolated and treated abominably by family members and caretakers."²⁹ While child abuse is apparently as old as the hills, it was not conceptualized as a problem (in the United States) until after the "Mary Ellen case" of 1874.³⁰ Since then it has been treated largely as an issue of individual pathology and medical deviance. While it has, in the words of Barbara J. Nelson, been "vigorously portrayed as a non-controversial issue," thus turning "policy makers away from considering the social-structural and social-psychological underpinnings of abuse and neglect," abuse is in fact "often intimately connected with poverty, racism, and patriarchy."³¹ It is, in other words, connected to the institution of family which is itself so wrapped up in problems of poverty, of race and of women.

²⁹Lois G. Forer, The New York Times Book Review, July 16, 1989, p. 21. Forer reviews America's Courts and Their Treatment of Sexually Abused Children, by Billie Wright Dziech and Charles B. Schudson (Boston: Beacon Press, 1989).

³⁰Barbara J. Nelson, Making an Issue of Child Abuse: Political Agenda Setting for Social Problems (The University of Chicago Press, 1984), p. 5

³¹See Making an Issue of Child Abuse, p. 4, p. 3, and pp. 89-90, for each of these respective quotations.

The Family as "Anti-Social"

Barrett and McIntosh sum up the costs of today's family in their claim that it is "anti-social." The family, they say, "arrogates" important social values to itself, i.e., "altruism, feeling, commitment, nurturance, collectivity and individual autonomy,"³² while at the same time acts to stifle and distort their realization. "Caring, sharing, and loving would be more widespread if the family did not claim them for its own."³³ It is with this last point that Barrett and McIntosh are at their weakest.

It is certainly true that the selling of these important ideals as "family values" helps to render the family immune from criticism, as it adds power to what Barrett and McIntosh call the widespread "imagery of idealized family life." And it is likewise true that this imagery provides more than public relations support for the family.³⁴ It actually gives shape to society, as the divisions of responsibility and authority assumed to be ideal in the family appear in the occupational structure, in residential and non-residential institutions, and

³²The Anti-social Family, p. 41. Barrett and McIntosh are here quoting the "feminist objectives" of Wini Breines, Margaret Cerullo and Judith Stacy, "Social Biology, Family Studies and Anti-feminist Backlash," Feminist Studies (vol. 4, no. 1, 1978), p.?

³³The Anti-social Family, p. 80. See also p. 42.

³⁴The Anti-social Family, p. 29.

elsewhere.³⁵ Thus family-like arrangements appear more natural. The notion of caring and the like as family business also supports the assumption that people live in, or should live in, families. In turn many social institutions are organized on the assumption that people do get their caring in families. Thus, compared to the conventional family, everything else seems, and sometimes is, "pale and unsatisfactory."³⁶

On the other hand, the critique of today's family as "anti-social" misses the mark on several points; it overlooks important aspects of our families and it is based on a naivete concerning "the social." Barrett and McIntosh are critical of the family but, like many of their opponents who celebrate the family, they make (or at least fail to question) the problematic assumption of the reality or possibility of an authentic self. They participate, in other words, in a philosophy of concordance. As a result their account of the costs of the family is inadequate and their recommendations are problematic.

I discuss this at length in the next chapter. Consider for now Barrett and McIntosh's call for "increased social responsibility" in the care of children and for justice

³⁵The Anti-social Family, pp. 29-30.

³⁶The Anti-social Family, p. 77 (and pp. 76-80).

based on "genuinely social control." These ideas are not explained. The word "social" appears throughout their text as a kind of undefended grant of legitimacy. They seem to take for granted that the proper commitment for people to have is to "society," rather than more narrowly to their "own" family, and the proper locus of the formation of such commitment is a more "social" world. This leads them to conclude that the strengthening of community requires the weakening of family ties.³⁷ They put it another way when they say that we need "social and political change so that ...[legitimate] needs and desires can be met in a more genuinely social context."³⁸ Specifically, while current increases in social control are correctly understood as intervention by unaccountable and/or pernicious bureaucracies, Barrett and McIntosh say that we must nonetheless "work towards greater social care and support for children, and greater social, rather than individual, control."³⁹

Barrett and McIntosh say little about what such collectivism would look like, but we do know about one feature -- the "total eradication of all familial ideology from the media and all public discourse ..."⁴⁰ We should,

³⁷The Anti-social Family, p. 53.

³⁸The Anti-social Family, p. 133.

³⁹The Anti-social Family, p. 134.

⁴⁰The Anti-social Family, p. 8.

in other words, dispense with any shared ideas about what a family ought to be.⁴¹ What if, however, the cause of equality for women requires instead the proffering of new ideals of family, or, as I argue in the chapters ahead, that the notion of family become more contestable without disappearing altogether? To my mind, the references to notions of "the family" as "ideology" and to the family itself as "anti-social" cover up some important ambiguities and possibilities. An unqualified endorsement of "the social" first of all merely replicates the image of the "family" at the level of the social and so amounts to an uncritical acceptance of today's family ideal of harmonious togetherness.⁴² Secondly the contemporary

⁴¹This is how I interpret their goal, although they never discuss the term "ideology" very carefully. See their statement that the "defence of an idealized 'family' invariably carries anti-feminist implications." The Anti-Social Family, p. 103.

⁴²Barrett and McIntosh's rejection of these possibilities is linked is indicated in their particular use of the troublesome word "ideology." This term was coined in the eighteenth century to refer to the enlightened science that would bring us past superstition, but since Marx it has meant that system of belief which, counterposed to the true, masks and so supports the exercise of power. Barrett and McIntosh use the word in keeping with Marxist tradition; for them the birth of a society of liberated people means the unlinking of "truth" from power. It means the transformation of imposed beliefs into liberating truth. It means the lifting of a sophisticated form of repression. It means the end of all ideology, not just family ideology. And this liberated society is understood by Barrett and McIntosh to be a more "social" society.

family is in fact both "anti-social" in some ways and the very basis of our "sociality" in others. The family is implicated both in the creation and in the arrogation of "caring, sharing and loving."

We should ask, following the lead of Foucault: could not the commitment to the social be in fact evidence of the exercise of power over us, or in us, such that this is the image we turn to, the condition we imagine, the thing we speak of, when we witness systematic injustice? Perhaps it is on the basis of this commitment that many different power relationships, many different interventions, are established. This possibility appears when the situation is considered from a genealogical point of view. Any such approach must draw heavily upon critical views like those of Barrett and McIntosh -- indeed it would amount to nothing without them -- but its aim is to recast their criticism in the light (or darkness?) of discordance. From the point of view of discordance, any views of family which fail to challenge concordance necessarily miss something and are part of the problem. The modern family exacts a cost through its contribution to normalization, and it does so precisely because of the way it buttresses assumptions to the effect that there is one true or proper or most free way to live. In the next chapter I show that Barrett and McIntosh share this problematic assumption

with a host of others. In the meantime I turn to a genealogical account of the family's role in normalization.

The Two-Tiered Production of the Modern Family

Here I rely especially on Jacques Donzelot, the author of The Policing of Families, as well as on Foucault's various more limited remarks on the subject.⁴³ Donzelot gives us a kind of map of the connections between the facticity of families and the variety of forces that have shaped that reality, while Foucault speaks more to the question of the kinds of identities forged by means of, among other things, the modern family. Taken together they suggest that the process of social management which involves the family depends on (even as it helps to sustain) a vision of concordance, both social and familial. When I look beyond what Donzelot and Foucault say to consider what they imply, I see a theory which places the constitution of the modern family at the heart of the transition to modern forms of self, modern forms of power, and modern ideas of concord.

Donzelot follows many others in emphasizing the role of reform-minded "experts" such as doctors, juvenile courts,

⁴³See The Policing of Families (New York: Pantheon Books, 1979), and Foucault, The History of Sexuality: Volume 1, An Introduction.

bureaucrats, counselors, and psychiatrists in the formation of today's family, which is conceived "as a moving resultant, an uncertain form whose intelligibility can only come from studying the system of relations it maintains with the sociopolitical level."⁴⁴ The construction of this uncertain form has been effected mainly through the propagation of new norms of family life, a process which he says began with the work of physicians in the last part of the eighteenth century. Specifically, Donzelot documents how the family in France changed because of "the propagation within it of medical, educative and relational norms whose over-all aim was to preserve children from the old customs,"⁴⁵ customs which had come to be seen as constraints to the proper and cost-efficient development of the population.⁴⁶

⁴⁴Policing, p. xxv. Michèle Barrett and Mary McIntosh agree with Donzelot. "... 'the family' is a constructed unity rather than a term on whose real referent or meaning we can agree." The Anti-social Family (New Left Books, 1982), p. 95. For a variety of accounts of the role of experts and elites in the formation of modern norms, see Christopher Lasch, Haven in a Heartless World: The Family Besieged (New York: Basic Books, 1977); Foucault, Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason (New York: Vintage Books, 1965); Betty Friedan, The Feminine Mystique (New York: Laurel Books, 1963); Philippe Ariès, Centuries of Childhood: A Social History of Family Life (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1962); and Barbara Ehrenreich and Deirdre English, For Her Own Good: 150 Years of the Expert's Advice to Women (Anchor Books, 1979).

⁴⁵Policing, p. xx.

⁴⁶Policing, p. 13.

Donzelot shows that the customs aimed at, and so likewise the remedies imposed, varied by class. Among the well-off the problem was seen by reformers to be the bad influence and dangerous practices of domestic servants, which meant physical danger as well as "promiscuity." Among the poor concern was directed at the use of wet-nurses (and later foundling hospitals), the vagabondage and indigence of those who did not succeed in the system of alliances that was used to form families, and the brothels that were part of the separation of sexuality and family required by this same system. Reformers saw these practices as dangerous and inefficient, and as breeding grounds for revolution. Too many potential contributors to society were lost; too many troublemakers were created.

The older regime of family which was under attack is called "the system of alliance" and the "ancien régime" by Donzelot. Eventually superceded by today's "advanced liberal family," the system of alliance had as its point

the determining of those--male and female--on whom would devolve the perpetuation of the patrimony; the possibility alone for them to marry, the other remaining in their charge; the discrimination between the legitimate offspring of sexual unions and the illegitimate offspring.⁴⁷

⁴⁷Policing, p. 24. On the "advanced liberal family" see p. 228.

Foucault understands the late medieval organization of kin in a similar fashion; the regime of alliance is "a system of marriage, of fixation and development of kinship ties, of transmission of names and possessions."⁴⁸ It "has as one of its chief objectives to reproduce the interplay of relations and maintain the law that governs them ..."⁴⁹

Donzelot is quite specific about the problems that came to be posed for order by alliance, and he describes the failure of attempts to ameliorate them while preserving the old system.

From the standpoint of the state, individuals who were rejected by the law of alliances became a source of danger through their vagabondage and indigence; they were also a loss in that they constituted unemployed forces. When the convents of preservation came into existence, along with brothels and foundling hospitals, their explicit purpose was to

⁴⁸The History of Sexuality, Vol. 1, p. 106. We can also properly call it a "patriarchal" system. The family and the state were considered homologous, at least in that each was understood as a system of rule; men rather than women were taken to be the only ones capable either of ruling or of being ruled by law. The ethics of the system of alliance was formulated by men and for men. By its terms women did not have the status to be ethical subjects. (For a discussion of the notion of an "ethical subject," and an account of moral problematization of sex in classical Greece as an ethics made by and for men, see Foucault's The Use of Pleasure: The History of Sexuality, Vol., 2 (Random House, 1985), especially pp. 22-23 and pp. 25-31). The transformation of the system of alliance was prefigured in the rise, in the middle ages, of a Christian ethics of marital relations -- in this ethics both men and women are considered as capable of being ethical subjects in the conjugal relationship.

⁴⁹The History of Sexuality, Vol. 1, p. 106.

reconcile the interests of families and the interest of the state, to bring harmony to families through the moralization of behavior, and to consolidate the force of the state through the treatment of the inevitable casualties of this family regime: the unmarried men and women and the abandoned children.⁵⁰

The type of families involved in this attempt at compromise were patriarchal in the strict sense of the term -- they were small political organizations ruled in theory by the father and directly accountable and linked to the state. The big concern of this type of family (certainly of the father, its public representative) was "honor." But these patriarchal families found it harder to contain their members by ensuring their upkeep, and they "abused" the system in order to reduce their own costs.⁵¹

The resultant vagabondage and abandonment came more and more to be seen as a "problem" as the nineteenth century wore on, not simply because there was some misery and poverty involved, but also because, first, such misery played into the hands of the socialists and neo-Malthusians who opposed both the old order and the

⁵⁰Policing, p. 24.

⁵¹For example, the foundling hospitals failed as an intermediate measure because many legitimate children were abandoned out of dire poverty (this became more common when infant mortality in the hospitals declined), and some were abandoned by parents who got themselves assigned to foster their own children, with pay. Policing, pp. 26-29.

reformers bent simply on updating it, and, second, because economic change meant that the productivity of bodies had to be maximized. This spelled the decline and mutation of the old system of alliance. In Foucault's words, "economic processes and political structures could no longer rely on it as an adequate instrument or sufficient support."⁵² The old family was more or less gone, says Donzelot, by the onset of the twentieth century, as reformers successfully championed, first, a mild version of feminism (more or less co-opted by the forces of philanthropy), second, compulsory and unified schooling, as called for by the logic of the liberal state, and, third, a series of remedies for the old customs.⁵³

These remedies, like the prior attempts at compromise, varied along class lines. The bourgeois classes were advised to construct liberal education around children and

⁵²The History of Sexuality, Vol. 1, p. 106.

⁵³Like Foucault, Donzelot views social order as a loose conglomeration -- a set of partially discrete elements which nonetheless effect and to a degree produce each other. Elites, for example, are understood to exist, but it is not assumed that they are united in interest or that their strategies always work. Similarly, while the order is thought of as a "structure," insofar as it does exert pressures on behavior and limits on the possible, these pressures are neither thought of as all in one consistent direction nor assumed to be "contradictions" which are pressing for resolution. For an explanation of this idea see Foucault, "Truth and Power," Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972-1977 (New York: Pantheon Books, 1980), pp. 109-133.

have been inundated by "medical" advice, and the working classes were subjected to a host of new regulations and surveillance which aimed to compel them to make children the center of life, to provide the "supervised freedom" consistent with the family's function. The former process Donzelot calls the system of "contract," which "corresponds to an accelerated liberalization of relations, both within and outside the family." The latter process is the system of "tutelage," by which families and family members who are "unsuitable" for or resist middle class norms are "stripped of all effective rights and brought into a relation of dependence vis-a-vis welfare and educative agents."⁵⁴

Donzelot argues that an important technique in the process of contract has been the use, by medical and teaching professionals, of women to disseminate new norms. A "privileged alliance between doctor and mother"⁵⁵ helped increase the domestic power of women vis-a-vis men while at the same time resulted in the "domestic instrumentalization of their persons" and the destruction of mid-wives and mid-wivery.⁵⁶ This alliance of women with philanthropy served, says Donzelot, as "a point of

⁵⁴Policing, p. xxi.

⁵⁵Policing, p. 18.

⁵⁶Policing. See p. 18 and p. xxii for reference to the respective quotations.

support" for (and, it should be added, as a limit to) the women's rights movements of the nineteenth century and early twentieth centuries.⁵⁷

For the working class mother, this meant tutelage; she was confronted by an array of programs of aid and surveillance, from family allowances to societies for the protection of children. These programs, says Donzelot, were based on an emphasis on her importance and a suspicion about her competence; they aimed to transform her into a "state approved nurse,"⁵⁸ meaning that their job was to be vigilant against the temptations of the cabaret and the street.⁵⁹ The bourgeois woman, on the other hand, was supposed to guard against the influence of domestic servants and participate as a missionary in the spread of new norms.⁶⁰ She was granted a more "professional" role, consistent with her mission within the family.

The two tracks of the transformation of the family have, says Donzelot, proceeded by means of forms of power which are neither strictly public nor private. They include both the "soft" inciting interventions called for by "psy"

⁵⁷Policing, p. 21.

⁵⁸Policing, pp. 29-31.

⁵⁹Policing, p. 45.

⁶⁰Policing, p. 46.

ideas (ideas derived from psychoanalytic discourse), such as the proffering of advice, and the "harder" social regulation of welfare policy and juvenile and family courts. Donzelot characterizes what has developed as a flexible attitude of social management, one guided by ideas that go under the name of Freud and which like their "Keynesian" counterparts in the economic realm operate without appearing to violate the autonomy of the objects of intervention.⁶¹ The modus operandi is a subtle form of "adjustment," which means encouragement and creation as much as prohibition. What is adjusted are the norms of behavior and the commitments of individuals. What we have here, to use Foucault's phrase, is "bio-power."

According to Donzelot the key to this bio-power is an idea made available by psychoanalysis. While psychiatry, by classifying children once and for all as good or bad, had affronted the family and denied as well the school's right to do its own categorizing, psychoanalysis asks both the family, the school, and the juvenile and family courts to do the "right thing" to improve the child's behavior, appealing to the family's desire for success and giving others a "scientific" basis for interventions. The "psy idea" which Donzelot says is at work here holds that family roles are important norms that cannot be lived up

⁶¹Policing, p. xvi.

to, rather than positions of power and function. Psychoanalysis defends the importance of the family, but it justifies always the discovery that the family has done its job poorly. This makes intervention to adjust things so they go more smoothly seem benign; it even has the effect of encouraging the revolt of and the demand for adjustments by individual family members. In Donzelot's words,

The disposition thus produced with regard to the family was an admirable one, for it made it possible to avoid the real dangers of the family's autonomy while facilitating social regulation by referring the frustrations of individuals to the family, by attaching their dreams and ambitions to it.⁶²

To summarize, according to Donzelot the advanced liberal family propogates norms that are "admirable" from the point of view of social regulation.⁶³ This is effected

⁶²Policing, p. 233.

⁶³For a reading of Donzelot that somehow misses the ironic bent of the use of the word "admirable" here, see Paul Hirst, "The Genesis of the Social," Politics and Power: Three (Routledge & Kegan Paul), pp. 67-82. Hirst reads Donzelot as approving of "the modern educative family" (p. 80). He then goes on to argue that the fight of middle class women for equality which was appropriated to regulate the family should be universalized so as to re-educate the working classes away from their materialism and make possible a non-inflationary "incomes-policy." Aside from its arrogant imputation and then rejection of "working-class materialism," this reading ignores Donzelot's argument that the "autonomy" of middle class families facilitates social regulation. Hirst also is rightly accused, by Fran Bennett, Beatrix Campbell and Rosalind Coward, of thoroughly misunderstanding both the aims and arguments of a good deal of feminism, as he sees its proper task as bringing a companionate and cultured family to the working class. "Feminists -- Degenerates of the Social," Politics and Power: Three, pp. 83-92. Hirst,

principally through the offering of advice, assistance, and protective intervention, although sanctions also are involved. Donzelot points out that advice is today an especially useful form of social control because it is consistent with the legitimation needs of the liberal state, which must avoid both socialism and statism. And the modern family is a useful vehicle for this control, as it offers a set of problems which are bound to be endlessly recreated and "solved."

Normalization and the Family as Harmony

While Donzelot never provides a summary of the norms propogated through the family, it is certain that if he did he would include the cultivation of an apolitical kind of commitment to "family values." A more complete list would include educational, relational, hygienic and sexual norms; the prevalent idea is that behavior should be cooperative, obedient, healthy (not "weird" or "ugly"), ambitious in an understated way, expressive and creative along as an acceptable career is either enhanced or left

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in his "Reply" (pp. 93-95), in turn rightly accuses his accusers of attacking him for things he does not say. Their debate is a good example of a male socialist and female feminists talking past one another rather than to each other. In the meantime, Donzelot is not well understood.

unjeopardized, heterosexual or invisibly and politely otherwise, accepting of the idea that lower class life tends to produce "misfits," and in accordance with the notion that the "social welfare" is an unambiguously good thing.

Part of what Donzelot is claiming is familiar; our arrangements typically turn our concern -- our efforts and our blame for problems -- towards ourselves and our families. We are typically caught up in trying to shore up, escape from, found anew, or get help for, our families. This part of his argument is consistent with the critique of Barrett and McIntosh, Rapp, and Habermas. On the other hand Donzelot is also pointing out that a more "public" outlook can be just as apolitical as a more "private" one, if the public activity and concern that comes along with it accepts "social welfare" as an unproblematic goal. The pursuit of concordance is apolitical however it is directed. This part of his thesis is not so familiar, but it is at the heart of his idea of how social control proceeds. The reality which we should be questioning is, as he puts it, "the triumph of the social."

Donzelot understands the social as simultaneously an image and a set of institutions and qualified personnel around which and by which people are normalized. The

social refers to social workers, social programs and the idea of social welfare.⁶⁴ The concept of the social once operated, says Donzelot, to indicate "the problem of poverty, the problem of others," but has come to mean "a general solidarity and the production of a lifestyle," something with which all are concerned, which all should seek.⁶⁵ And, he claims, the emergence of the contemporary liberalized family form is intelligible only by rendering problematic the rise of this new "reality principle of our societies."⁶⁶

Donzelot, in his cryptic way, is getting at the following idea: in modern western societies we tend to posit the social and the political as opposites, or at any rate as fundamentally different. The political is sometimes seen as an agonistic realm which stands (either as a path or an obstacle) between current reality and the possibility of a more truly social existence. The proper goal of political activity is, by this view, to make

⁶⁴"[The social is] the set of means which allow social life to escape material pressures and politico-moral uncertainties; the entire range of methods which make the members of a society relatively safe from the effects of economic fluctuations by providing a certain security -- which give their existence possibilities of relations that are flexible enough, and internal stakes that are convincing enough, to avert the dislocations that divergences of interests and beliefs would entail. Policing, p. xxvi.

⁶⁵Policing, p. xxvii.

⁶⁶Policing, p. xxvi.

itself obsolete through its success; its appropriate aim is to replace relations of power and difference with "social" relations (Marx is perhaps the most famous of the many proponents of this view).

The most successful opponent of this position is the classic liberalism championed by, among others, Hobbes and Locke. By their view, the political is an inherent limit on the social. People and groups are understood by liberalism to be "social" (or anti-social) each in their own way. Sociality is, then, for like-minded people, and differences between individuals and groups create the conflicts of politics.

By either of these views the arena of the social is postulated as exterior to politics; it is postulated as the proper, or empirical, locus of concordance. It is where people get along, or where they realize their essence. Donzelot, on the other hand, rather than positing an opposition by nature between the political and the social, views the latter as a construction with particular political ramifications; rather than ask how can we achieve the truly social life, he wants to know how, and by virtue of what discourse, it is that we come to take for granted the primacy of the social.

While Donzelot, as a conclusion of his work, asks this question only to leave it unanswered, he does offer some

thoughts regarding how this primacy is connected to practices of social regulation. His point seems to be that the goal of social harmony finds its primary expression in the ideal of the harmonious middle-class family; this ideal then provides the rationale for interventions and the proffering of advice that differ by class and which denigrate, depoliticize, and even disassemble alternative groups and families. Psy ideas, welfare rules, and family court rulings all repeat the virtues of harmony as they move to enable and enforce individual adjustments and smooth over differences. The ideal of the modern family is thus both dependent on and valorized by a depoliticizing arrangement of interventions. In Donzelot's words, the family is inscribed "within a new form of sociality, of which it appears to be both queen and prisoner."⁶⁷ By his view, then, the "advanced liberal family" is anti-political precisely because it is anything but "anti-social."

Clearly then, Donzelot and Barrett and McIntosh are at odds in some respects. The latter thinkers, like many in the critical tradition, are likely to refer to the effects of the contemporary family as "oppressive." The concern is with denial and repression. Genealogy, on the other hand, refers to them as "normalizing," and the concern is

⁶⁷Policing, p. xxii and p. 7.

with the production and privileging of certain ways of being. By virtue of this concern, genealogy is critical of critical theory for its tendency to privilege a particular form of self or way of life. This opposition should not, however, be overdrawn. Critical and genealogical thinking can and should be combined in the analysis of the contemporary family. This is because oppression and normalization co-exist in modern societies. Many are kept from, or denied, what they want and need, and certain identities and outlooks are imposed and privileged without adequate justification. The contemporary family is implicated in both these processes.

I turn now to compare a critical and a genealogical explanation of the tremendous power (popularity) of the family idea. The harm done by today's family is not, after all, fully accounted for unless this power is explained somehow. On this question both the critical and genealogical approach have something to offer. On the other hand even together they are inadequate to the task. Affirmation is needed as well. This is because, first, the contemporary family cannot be reduced to a mere guardian of order; it has roots in aspects of ourselves that predate the modern era and which will be presumably be here long after it is gone. Second, neither oppression nor normalization can be explained without reference to what besides them the family is.

The Power of the Family Idea

Donzelot raises the question of the power of the family idea when he accuses psychoanalysis of helping to "refer" individual frustration and "attach" individual dreams and ambitions to the family. He does not say much, however, about what accounts for the possibility of this referral and this attachment. Why is the family so useful as a site for this power? What is the appeal of the particular dreams involved? These questions point to the self; they ask us to consider what it is about the self that enables today's "the family" and "the social" to be produced. Foucault provides a genealogical answer to this question by speaking of the ways in which the self is, itself, a production. I turn first, however, to an answer rooted in the critical tradition.

Barrett and McIntosh take note of the lack of an explanation for the "appeal" of the family in Donzelot's work, and they blame this failure on his method. The deconstructive approach can, they say, only point to the strategic value or function (for a set of persons or an order of relations) of the creation of a want, need, feeling, or commitment. By definition, then, Donzelot can say nothing about what in people's nature would make them amenable to be "constructed" this way or that.

Barrett and McIntosh counter by focusing on the ways the modern family (inadequately) meets people's needs and accords with widespread (but mistaken) beliefs.⁶⁸ They first point out something I have already mentioned -- that people sometimes have rights and obligations among family members that provide for a level of economic and emotional security not found elsewhere in our societies. The family is more or less the only place to turn to, even though it inadequately meets these needs, and at times turns the search for security into isolation, loneliness, mental anguish, and physical abuse, especially for women. Their second, third and fourth points are equally valid. Families sometimes provide a place where people can more openly express emotional need, the family operates to provide marks of "similarity, familiarity and belonging," and the married couple typically has more resources than a single parent to financially provide for children.⁶⁹

Barrett and McIntosh also point to three beliefs which support the family and which they clearly consider flawed or mistaken (although they don't provide much by way of refutation or discussion). First, it is strongly believed

⁶⁸This is only partly in keeping with their commendable commitment to follow "a theory of ideology that casts people as participants rather than as passive consumers." The Anti-social Family, p. 21.

⁶⁹The Anti-social Family, p. 23.

that children need two differently sexed "parents" (natural or surrogate) -- "the family is seen as naturally given and as socially and morally desirable."⁷⁰ Second, the family is typically seen as rooted in our deepest biological urges. And, third, the family is thought to be a locus for and a creator of important "pre-capitalist" values such as the capacity to love.

In sum, Barrett and McIntosh point out that the model of family promoted today is based on a mid-nineteenth century ideal according to which maternal tenderness is complemented by fatherly independence. This model is popular, they say, because for most people its the only means available to pursue some deeply important goals, in particular the satisfactory and fulfilling raising of children.

In our society this model of family, however successfully it may actually be realized, offers the most plausible system for rearing children who will be competent and secure, stable and self-sufficient.⁷¹

This position is certainly on the mark with regards to the way the family is understood today and what is asked of it. By referring to the various needs monopolized but inadequately served by the family, Barrett and McIntosh do

⁷⁰The Anti-social family, p. 26.

⁷¹The Anti-social Family, p. 29.

two important things. They point to the lack of alternatives to the family, and they raise, by referring to need, the issue of the self and its nature. Its impossible to explain the appeal of the family without some reference to need. They have not, however, provided either an explanation of their own or much of a critique of Donzelot. On the latter count, none of the claims in their list of reasons for family appeal contradict Donzelot's theory. Only the claim that today's ideal family form is the most "plausible" means, in contemporary conditions, of raising "self-sufficient" children appears to be prohibited to Donzelot, given his commitment to avoid attributing properties to subjects. Donzelot does not, however, assert that subjects have no properties, and so he would not be contradicting himself if he believed that this claim is or might be the case.

As for Barrett and McIntosh's own stab at explanation, it does not go far enough. Even if powerful interests are supported by the acceptance of today's family ideal (as they are), this does not by itself explain this acceptance. Nor is it enough to show that family ideals are widely promoted in our cultural media; it remains to ask why this promotion is possible and why it is successful. What, again, is its point of application? Their discussion of the need for "belonging" is fairly

vague and mostly assertive. They simply point out that the family is "seen" as naturally given, and then suggest that it is really only a more generalized need for belonging that is appropriated by the family.⁷² If this were the end of the story, one would expect that people would only reluctantly endorse the family, for lack of alternatives.

Barrett and McIntosh are in this case governed, and hampered, by their undefended assumption of the benign and essential nature of the social. People's desire for belonging is thought to be both natural and properly expressed (automatically flowering?) in a "social" context; the existence of the family and family ideology are then attacked as "anti-social" because they make the political implications of this desire negative.

The needs and satisfactions to which we refer - affection, security, intimacy, sexual love, parenthood and so on - are not artificial. [Our] purpose is to demonstrate the need for social and political change so that such needs and desires can be met in a more genuinely social context.⁷³

This fails to consider what is implied by Donzelot and said by Foucault, that the political power of the family ideal stems in part from the way it is used to amplify, promote, incite, and problematize the need for belonging.

⁷²The Anti-social Family, pp. 26-29.

⁷³The Anti-social Family, p. 133.

To say this is not to rule out the reality of any such need; it is rather to show that the "policing" of families involves the production of family appeal, not merely its channeling. And the dreams and ambitions so produced are in an important way like the ideal of freedom invoked by Barrett and McIntosh -- in them harmony and belonging are joined seamlessly to self-expression, self-development and autonomy.⁷⁴ By Donzelot's reading, then, Barrett and McIntosh's critique of the idealized family can act only to reinforce that which gives the ideal its power, which is this larger ideal of freedom. Barrett and McIntosh reject the family for the sake of the social; Donzelot tells us that this cannot work. This is because it is precisely the commitment to harmony and to the end of contradiction (the social) that makes "the family" so important and so difficult a reality for us. And the ideal of the family, in turn, helps propagate this commitment. The contemporary family is complicit with normalization.

Donzelot, then, is concerned to deconstruct an ideal of harmony, rather than to counter the family ideal with

⁷⁴See for example their assertion of the need for "greater social, rather than individual, control" in the care of children. The issue of social control through interventions is dealt with as a mere problem of the form these interventions "currently take." The Anti-social Family, p. 134.

another. He does not, however, explain people's commitment to this ideal. Flexible "psy" techniques cannot by themselves be enough to enable norms to "float" and the "social" to emerge as the unquestioned value around which systems of power are constructed. The subjectification of the self to modern disciplines requires a point of application as well as a method. This point of application is the human being.

An advocate of genealogy might well interject at this point: isn't it possible, and indeed plausible, that modern disciplines create a form of self which then serves as that needy being which comes to value the social so highly? Couldn't psy techniques work in concert with other mechanisms to create their own point of application? Foucault makes this kind of an argument when he describes the contemporary family as based in, and abetting in, the "deployment of sexuality."

Sexuality and the Family

I drew attention, in the last chapter, to Foucault's argument that sexuality is a modern construct, rather than an underlying essence or drive. Consistent with this, Foucault says that the modern family is neither the site of a new liberation of sexuality, nor of a new repression of the same. "On the contrary, its role is to anchor

sexuality and provide it with a permanent support."⁷⁵ It is sexuality's "privileged point of development."⁷⁶ Originally perilous for the rule-concerned system of alliance, the deployment of sexuality gradually transformed it and preserved it, as the relations of alliance become medical concerns; doctors, educators, and psychiatrists helped reconcile "the unfortunate conflicts between sexuality and alliance."⁷⁷

What does this have to with the power of the family ideal? By Foucault's reading it is this transition which has provided the basis for the constitution of the family as a site of intense frustrations, dreams, and ambitions.⁷⁸ Foucault argues that the family can be constructed as it is -- as a place of such great importance -- because of the prior fixing of the individual as a site of sexuality. The family is what it is because of the concern for sexuality which it helps to maintain. The family is, then, a social construction that helps to create its own point of application. The sexualized subject is typically heavily invested in family ties -- both negatively and positively. The "affective

⁷⁵The History of Sexuality, Vol. 1, p. 108.

⁷⁶The History of Sexuality, Vol. 1, p. 108.

⁷⁷The History of Sexuality, Vol. 1, p. 111.

⁷⁸The History of Sexuality, Vol. 1, pp. 106-110.

intensification of the family space" is connected, he tells us, to the fact that today's family functions as a "hotbed of constant sexual incitement."⁷⁹

The shift toward the positive production of sexuality, says Foucault, created both problems and possibilities, from the point of view of order. The maintenance of sexual incitement, as well as the putting of its results into use to the ends of social management, had to be reconciled with the threats it posed to the system of alliance, which functions through the strict control of sexual engagements. Or this at least had to be done if the two systems were to be made to function together. This is the reason, Foucault tells us, for the particular concern of our cultures with the problem of incest.

If for more than a century the West has displayed such a strong interest in the prohibition of incest, if more or less by common accord it has been seen as a social universal and one of the points through which every society is obliged to pass on the way to becoming a culture, perhaps this was because it was found to be a means to self-defense, not against an incestuous desire, but against the expansion and the implications of this deployment of sexuality which had been set up, but which, among its many benefits, had the disadvantage of ignoring the laws and the juridical forms of alliance.⁸⁰

How does this deployment of sexuality operate? As a form of bio-power, it is (as I said in the last chapter)

⁷⁹The History of Sexuality, Vol. 1, p. 109.

⁸⁰The History of Sexuality, Vol. 1, p. 109.

concerned not so much with rules as with knowledge. Four domains of knowledge have, according to Foucault, been strategically central. First, there was a "hysterization of women's bodies." Women's bodies were made into objects of knowledge; and these objects were made to speak. They were analyzed as "thoroughly saturated with sexuality," intrinsically pathological, and responsible for the "regulated fecundity" of the social body and "the life of children." Second, there was a "pedagogization of children's sex." Children were seen to be the locus of a "precious and perilous ...sexual potential." Third, there was a "socialization of procreative behavior." A concern with "population" called for the making of the fertile couple into an object of regulation and knowledge. Fourth (least important according to Foucault) was the "psychiatrization of perverse pleasure." The "sexual instinct," in this case as it operated in adults, was made the focus of investigation and correction.⁸¹

I am certainly not qualified to make a final evaluation of Foucault's provocative thesis, and I am not sure if anyone is. It is not easy to know to what extent the unities inside ourselves which we seem to "find" are actually our own productions or are instead revealing of something more "essential." I can, however, say the

⁸¹The History of Sexuality, Vol. 1, p. 104.

following. First, I accept the argument that regulatory actions concerned with the parents/children relation and the husband/wife relation have played a big part in giving the modern family its particular form. This is the thesis of Donzelot. He and Foucault agree that this social regulation has proceeded partly by means of the constitution of domains of knowledge, as the modern "sciences" of the self proceed partly by getting patients and clients to speak the "truth" about themselves.⁸²

Second, I think that Foucault and Donzelot are on the mark in the ways that they amend (and draw upon) various feminist and Marxist analyses of the construction of the modern family. They both point out that the regulatory actions involved were first of all not concerned with maintaining patriarchy so much as transforming it for the sake of better population management, and second of all varied considerably by social class.⁸³ "There was no

⁸²See also Ehrenreich and English, For Her Own Good: 150 Years of the Expert's Advice to Women, on the role of experts and elites in the formation of the modern family.

⁸³Radical feminism, characteristically, includes the claim that the construction of the modern family (like all preceding family forms) is concerned with the maintenance of patriarchy (the rule of men over women). Donzelot's and Foucault's histories suggest a distinction made explicitly by Jean Elshtain; "male dominance and patriarchy are not the same thing, though the one may be a concomitant of the other." See her discussion of radical feminism in Public Man, Private Woman, p. 215.

unitary sexual politics."⁸⁴ Rather, sexuality was first deployed, as a technique of maximization rather than repression, "by the bourgeoisie with respect to themselves; like the "symbolics of blood" of the system of alliance, the "analytics of sexuality" "has to be seen as the self-affirmation of one class rather than the enslavement of another."⁸⁵

Most importantly for the question at hand, I cannot dismiss the idea that the appeal which the image of family has today is connected to a modern sexualization of the body. It seems to me to be highly plausible that people have come to have more invested in family relations -- whether this means the centrality family "success" has for them, the psychological devastation of family disaster, the power of the desire to escape one's family, or the power of a desire to found a family -- because they have come to have a concern in discovering their own sexual truth. The question of one's sexual truth seems so important because of the way it has been bound up with the question of one's personal truth -- of one's identity. In other words, it seems to me quite possible that more in our lives turns on our private, personal family relations

⁸⁴The History of Sexuality, Vol. 1, p. 122.

⁸⁵The History of Sexuality, Vol. 1, p. 123. See pp. 122-127 and 148.

than might otherwise do so if we were not so directed to exploring the question of who and what we really and truly are.

And we are so directed. We are pressured, through a variety of mechanisms, to form a coherent, unified, and sensible unity -- an identity with an address, a career or purpose, a sexual preference, etc. We moderns are not only heavily "sexualized," but quite self-conscious and very homesick. And we are situated in a web of interventions and a complex of institutions which enforce a particular set of familial practices and which privilege one particular form of "the family" both as an ideal and as the most pragmatic way to survive. We make our way, then, as homesick subjects in a world governed by tightly drawn institutional imperatives of growth. In these conditions the modern family normalizes and oppresses. It is implicated in the same privatized pursuit of affluence that makes it such a compelling (but inadequate) alternative to the harsh realities of that pursuit.

Family Appeal: Kin Ties and the Natural

But is this really the whole story? The tracing out of the deployment of sexuality does not, in my view, suffice to account for the power of the family idea, any more than it is enough to point to political advantage (such as male

advantage) and media influence. At some point explanation requires reference to "natural" (not merely produced) attributes of human beings. This is because, for one thing, "production" can only take place on the basis of some raw material. Secondly, such "raw material" does exist. Humans are natural beings, and, as such, have certain features. While they are always completed (come to be) within particular forms of social order, the range of possibilities is not infinite. This idea is entirely consistent with a philosophy of discordance, which, rather than dispute the existence of the natural, only asks us to, first, recognize that humans are never simply natural, and, second, suspend the idea that the "naturalness" of something is automatically a claim to legitimacy.⁸⁶

This last point is especially important given the conservative twist usually given to the association of the family and the natural. The import of the natural is in

⁸⁶All our activities are in some sense natural, yet hardly immune from criticism. Our ability to reflect on and complete our own nature (within the bounds our particular historical circumstances) gives rise to several facets of human existence: we are often able to resist the natural (it is natural to feel hunger, but one can certainly fast), we never experience the natural directly but always as a source of strength for and/or resistance to particular practices (the natural is always historically mediated), and, finally, experiences and needs which partake of the natural can and do conflict with and present obstacles to each other. The natural, in other words, is both us and other to us. It enables us to be even as we experience it as a limit and an obstacle.

fact inherently contestable because, while the human body in the real world must be the ultimate "point of application" for the production of self, culture and identity, the body itself can never be finally (once and for all) or objectively explained. Actual humans bodies are first of all always more than bodies, and it is always just such real humans who do the explaining.

What, then, is the point of saying that a practice partakes of the natural? While the question of human nature is inherently contestable, this does not mean either that it can be avoided or that all talk of the issue is merely relative. The human condition leaves us with the possibility of making useful and important statements about what it is that we -- as historical, finite beings -- recognize as central to ourselves. To call something natural is to make the (contestable) claim that something of importance -- something good or necessary -- is made possible by that practice, whatever of the bad or the unnecessary is also made possible. It is to caution us that something good may be threatened or lost if that aspect of human life is forsaken, denied, minimized, or substituted for.

How, then, is the modern family form linked to the natural? I begin with the proposition that to be human is to be embodied, finite, reflective (in various ways and

degrees), dependent for existence on some sort of pattern of social relations, and formed as a self by virtue of participation in some set of moral, rather than merely utilitarian, allegiances. Jean Elshtain puts it well when she says that people are (1) in need of living among others "in relations of concrete particularity," and (2) bound by "an imperative ...to discover, to understand and to create meaning."⁸⁷ To these two conditions of existence discordance adds a third which has already been mentioned.

Humans are not designed to fit neatly into any social form, and since no ideal form has been predesigned to mesh with every drive and stirring within the self, every particular form of completion [of humans through social form] subjugates something in us, does violence to selves even while enabling them to be.⁸⁸

To say that these are universal characteristics of the human condition is of course to leave plenty of room for a tremendous variety of human ways of life and worlds of meaning. It is not, however, to leave infinite room.⁸⁹ When Eli Zaretsky speaks of the family, he makes an important distinction along these lines. "Ties of

⁸⁷Public Man, Private Woman, p. 318.

⁸⁸Connolly, Politics and Ambiguity, p. 13.

⁸⁹To put it as Martha Nussbaum might, we are naturally concerned with questions of the good, but there is no single good life. The good for humans is multiple, fragile, and dilemma-bound. See, for example, her comments on Aristotle's view of the family and women, The Fragility of Goodness, p. 370.

sexuality, kinship, and biological and psychological dependence are inevitable; self-supporting nuclear families are not."⁹⁰ Ties of dependence are apparently a universal response to universal features of human life. More specifically, humans seem to invariably use the category of the biological (among others) to make concrete distinctions regarding their relations with each other. Moreover, kin distinctions (real and fictive), are typically used to posit specific obligations and recognize specific shared memories and experiences.

There are, not surprisingly, some good reasons for this. The ties to which humans give the status of kin can, as Aristotle recognized, provide a framework for the construction of an "ethical" reality; and, as he also knew, this framework is not easily replaced by some other human institution, practice, or experience. This is because humans need the recognition and experience of involuntary ties to the past and the future as a means to "ground" (make possible) their formation as ethical selves. Stanley Hauerwas has put this in terms of developing an understanding about love.

If we are to learn to care for others, we must first learn to care for those we find ourselves joined to by accident of birth. Only then will love be

⁹⁰"The Place of the Family in the Origins of the Welfare State," Rethinking the Family: Some Feminist Questions, p. 193.

understood, aside from attraction to those who are like us, also as regard and respect for those whom we have not chosen but to whom we find ourselves tied.⁹¹

Nel Noddings understands this regard and respect as the development of "ethical caring,"⁹² where, again, caring is an aspect of identity rather than the result simply of a particular concordance of feelings or interest. Like Hauerwas, she thinks that this development depends on experiences of caring that people have within ongoing and reciprocal relations with specific others. Ethical life begins, says Noddings, with "natural caring," the acting on behalf of another done simply out of desire. Conversely, "ethical caring" is caring motivated by a sense of duty, or an experience of an "I must." By Noddings' account we come to experience this "I must" through the memories we have of our experiences of natural caring and the feelings that were part of it.⁹³ These memories for most people stem from the relationships to adults that they had as children, and Noddings implies what Hauerwas says outright: that the family plays a

⁹¹"The Moral Meaning of the Family," Commonweal (1 August, 1980), p. 435.

⁹²"An Ethic of Caring: From Natural Caring to Ethical Caring," Women, Culture and Morality: Selected Essays, ed. by Joseph L. Devitis (Peter Lang, 1987), pp. 333-372.

⁹³"An Ethic of Caring," p. 339.

critical role in the forging of humans as ethical beings.⁹⁴

I more cautiously conclude only that humans must find themselves cared for and able to care in return in some fashion or another, not necessarily in a "family," in order to develop as ethical (human) beings (I discuss this at more length in the final chapter). This is, however, even in these thin terms enough of a claim to help explain the powerful appeal of the family. Humans have routinely used the designation of "biological" in forging links of obligation because it stands for that which cannot be chosen. To see something as intrinsic, rather than as chosen (and dispensable), is to mark it as more deeply a part of the self. By marking kin ties people bring others into a relation with themselves at the level of identity, and this is part of having an identity. As Hauerwas says, the fact of kin ties gives us each a story, and it is by

⁹⁴While I think that the ambit of the ethical obligation that Noddings derives from the experience of caring is excessively narrow -- excluding non-human animals and those we cannot form reciprocal ethical relations with -- her point stands regardless; the movement toward ethical commitment, of whatever sort, is grounded in the interpretation of one's own experiences of concrete caring and being cared-for by specific others. This idea is in keeping with Elshtain's discussion of the case of "the wild boy of Aveyron," a youth who grew up without the benefit of human attachment, and so lacked the ability either to form such attachments or to live any kind of a life without them. Public Man, Private Woman, pp. 323-325.

thinking of ourselves as a part of a narrative that we each come to see ourselves as an individual, historic being.⁹⁵

Discordance, Concordance, and Kin Ties

The modern family serves a role, then, in the fashioning of human identity. To say this, however, is not to posit the modern family form as a universal; it is only to indicate one of its most important sources of sustenance. The modern family has appeal not only because modern society disallows or disables alternatives, not only because it allows some people to compare themselves favorably to others, not only because it seems to promise autonomy and responsibility, and not only because people are pressured to concern themselves with the truth of their being, but also because it speaks to certain imperatives of human nature and the human condition. The contemporary family is, then, an ambiguous achievement.

At one level this ambiguity points to a general truth. There is no way of creating human identity that is entirely benign. Just as a sense of identity can give us the resources to take a stand against prevailing ways or some of our own commitments, it also involves the imposition of uniformity on ourselves and makes us

⁹⁵See Hauerwas, "The Moral Meaning of the Family," p. 435.

vulnerable to pressures of normalization. Similarly, kin ties enable and constrain. Today's family serves not only to delimit and control the bounds of human caring but also to enable us to find and make it. This ambiguity helps to explain how it is that the having of children can be today both a means to tie parents more firmly to the status quo and also a representation of a personal step beyond its dictates. The "natural" appeal of the modern form of family cuts at least two ways -- it is able to serve both as a means of normalization and as a means of empowerment, sustenance, and resistance.

At another level this ambiguity points to a specific criticism and to a specific political position. The criticism is as follows. Today's family is thoroughly bound up with a kind of enabling that is particularly disabling when it comes to political change. On the one hand this is simply a feature of tangible ties with others. To maintain and renew such ties (for example by having children) is to express a faith in the future and therefore to some extent to the specific future that one's civilization is pointed towards. Our family ties therefore put pressure on us to endorse this future. This cannot be the whole story, however, as tangible ties with others are also a precondition for a politics carried out by caring selves. It is possible to be a self and be

political, if not about everything all at once. Western family reality is, however, depoliticizing, and this is because of the specific features of the wider order which it repeats and reinforces. Modern western civilization is culturally anti-political (certainly in the United States) and is institutionally built around the pursuit of growth, affluence, and concordance. So, therefore, is the family.

The ambiguity here points to a political position. The criticism of the contemporary family for its links with normalization and oppression should be tempered by the recognition that we will need something like it if we are to strive towards a less normalizing and oppressive order, if, in other words, we are to develop individual empowerment, slack in the order, space for difference, and (a condition of many other goals) a political movement to tame growth imperatives.

What should be changed and what should be retained? I discuss this further in the final chapter. To put it in a nutshell, we need on the one hand to loosen our idea of what counts as family, and to make explicit the ambiguity of worth -- the good and the bad -- of any organization of relations along lines of kin; we need in other words, to politicize the concept of family. On the other hand we should recognize the profound and legitimate importance that kin ties have for people when we consider the proper

bounds of any transformation. We should consider the need to ground and begin ethical commitment with caring for specific others. We should, finally, insist on the existence of a link, at least in those societies that require the considerable coordination of the activities of self-conscious participants, between space for difference and the preservation of some kind of distinction between the public and the private. In the final chapter I elaborate on and defend this vision of a politicized and yet continuing public/private split. This means I will defend one of my two central claims -- that child rearing in small households with some kind of private status is now, and will continue to be, desirable.

But what of the other side of my thesis? I also argue that the very idea of the value of private households as families will continue to be undesirably and unnecessarily depoliticizing, normalizing and oppressing as long as it is bound up with the affirmation of concordance. Much of today's critique and celebration of family is bounded, and hampered, by its assumptions of concord. I turn next to this subject.

CHAPTER 4

THEORY OF THE CONTEMPORARY FAMILY: ASSUMPTIONS OF CONCORDANCE AND DISCORDANCE

To summarize my argument so far, assumptions of concordance embedded in our familial discourse and practice play a role in the exercise of power, and especially in processes of normalization. To assume or seek to realize an authentic self is to endorse without adequate reservations some mode of imposing form upon the body. And this is particularly a problem because our world is increasingly a single order requiring extensive social management and governed by demanding imperatives. In this situation, the aggressive quest for legitimacy all too easily turns inward; people tend to define themselves so they can see themselves as free (and the order as legitimate) within the existing constraints. The conventions required for the order to function become norms, and room for the unpredictable, the eccentric, the new, the reborn, the rebellious, or simply the different is squeezed away.

The prevailing vision of the family invokes just such a apolitical reality. The phrase "the family" usually refers, at least when meant as an ideal, to a kind of seamless harmony among the family members, a shared commitment to the polite and subdued pursuit of middle class success, and a shared concern for (and a lifetime commitment to) "one's own," which means family and close friends. "Family" is typically used as an adjective to refer that which is good and nice (wholesome), as in the much touted "family values," and in this case the last thing that is indicated is a commitment to political action or the experience or expression of difference.

This vision of family is integral to various techniques of power at the same time as it is one of the effects of that power. As Donzelot points out, the modern private family is produced through the two-tiered techniques of tutelage and contract. A result is the attachment of dreams and ambitions to the private family and the production of sexuality so as to promote privatized goals, homesickness, and the pursuit of concord.

I am claiming, then, that both as idea and practice the contemporary family normalizes through the notions of concordance that it invokes and enforces.

As a wary reader might point out, I have not yet done much to demonstrate the validity of this thesis. Perhaps,

after all, "homesickness" is as natural as the valorization of kin, and not even a sickness besides. Perhaps it has nothing to do with "the family," and the latter is neither an imposed construct nor implicated in any other kind of imposition. Perhaps, then, Donzelot's interpretation takes a reality that has been freely chosen or reflects the rational dictates of a productive economy and misunderstands it as the result of an elaborate and multi-level "disciplining" of selves.

Empirical tools of demonstration are of limited use here. Measurements and survey research might help to refine or refute specific claims about what should count as "normal." They might also warn us of serious dissatisfactions brewing within the populace. We might even notice that deviance persists no matter how norms are understood. At best, empirical work could follow Donzelot's lead and continue to trace the differential methods that the state and experts use to deal with families, to encourage and promote and enforce certain ideas of families, to get people to speak of themselves and their families, etc. But no such method can ever tell us for certain what the important "facts" are or which interpretation makes the best sense of them. And when it comes to the questions of what about ourselves could be otherwise and which actions should count as chosen instead

of subtly imposed, empirical techniques are clearly at a disadvantage.

To some extent, then, this "evidence" problem is simply a feature of this type of argument. Theoretical claims are interpretations. The evidence for their validity is in the sense they make of experience. My account of family appeal should, if it is any good, help make sense of (and perhaps give rise to) experiences of ambiguity regarding families and the expectations and aspirations that families involve. It should also help make sense of the persistence of the legitimacy enjoyed by the order of modernity. Concordance promotes the family and vice-versa; and in a anti-political culture of concordance it is especially hard call into question that which one's identity is already invested in.

This argument is, I suspect, likely to make sense to (and appeal to) those who already wonder at the legitimacy enjoyed by modern orders, and who have perhaps thus far dealt with this problem by expressing disappointment in the working class, crediting "ideological" machinery as too powerful, seeing structural obstacles to change as all-encompassing, or placing their hopes in an impending immiseration and collapse of legitimacy.

There is, fortunately, evidence of a sort which I can offer to better make the case that the explanation of

modern legitimacy offered here is worth considering. I can continue to compare it to other explanations, and I can show that assumptions of concordance and normalizing implications are indeed built into much of today's discourse on family. I have already alluded to this latter task, as I have said that critical and celebratory views of the family tend to concur in assuming or endorsing concordance. In fact a great deal of our talk concerning family does this; it depends on the notion that, beneath the self as heteronomous social product, there lies some kind of authentic or true self the realization of which constitutes freedom. While concordance is not disproved by showing that it is everywhere (to the contrary!), neither is it proved by virtue of its being widely assumed. And I can show not only that concordance is widely assumed in the theoretical discourse on the family, not only that in this context such an assumption can be seen to overlook or abet normalization, but also that by its lights the essentiality, the arbitrariness, and the ambiguity of the modern family and its effects are not well accounted for.

In this chapter I review a number of perspectives on the family in order to make this case.

Plato and Aristotle on Family

The story of concordance and the contemporary western family can be said to begin for the west with the emergence of the modern privileging of the choosing, reflective, self. Generally speaking, what is assumed today is the validity of a creating and choosing self -- an active being that is capable either of making or clearly seeing an underlying harmony in themselves and the universe. Compared to this notion, the idea of a concord guaranteed by God, but always only partially glimpsed by his reflective but finite and mortal creations, has taken a back seat.

On the other hand this same story can also be said to begin with the thought of classical Greece, which anticipated -- and so laid groundwork for -- so much of this modern understanding. The debate between Plato and Aristotle foreshadowed much of today's argument. Plato attacked the private family for its promotion of private loyalties, divisiveness and maldevelopment of the self.¹ Aristotle praised the private family as a building block of virtue in the soul and in the community. Plato wanted the bonds and loyalties of family to be transferred into loyalties to the whole community, and this led him as far

¹See "The Republic," The Great Dialogues of Plato, trans., by W.H.D. Rouse (The New American Library, 1956), Books IV and VII.

as to challenge even the Greek sexual division of labor.² Aristotle, conversely, defended this division. For him, friendship, sharing, and political stability -- all aspects of the good life -- depend on a coming together of men each of whom has an independent base in a private household of women, slaves if possible, and other property.³

Plato and Aristotle not only mirror some of today's disagreements -- they, like many modern thinkers, share a common assumption of concordance.⁴ Elshtain has pointed out how Plato's positions on family reveal his thoroughgoing commitment to the virtue of an abstract soul and the achievement of an ahistorical truth.⁵ In the pursuit of the virtuous unity of the whole society, Plato was willing to countenance the complete coordination of social activity, including a complex system of social

²"The Republic," Book V. See also Susan Moller Okin, "Philosopher Queens and Private Wives: Plato on Women and the Family," The Family in Political Thought, ed. by Jean Bethke Elshtain (University of Massachusetts Press, 1982), p. 41.

³The Politics, trans. by T.A. Sinclair (Penguin, 1962), Book II, Chapters 2-4.

⁴For an excellent discussion of some of the ways contemporary feminist discourse tacitly (and problematically) endorses Platonic and Aristotelian models of the good society, see Mary E. Hawkesworth, "Re/Vision: Feminist Theory Confronts the Polis," Social Theory and Practice, 13, no. 2 (Summer 1987).

⁵Public Man, Private Woman, pp. 20-41.

engineering and eugenics administered entirely by an unaccountable wise few. The happiness of the whole is assumed by Plato to be in the end the same as the happiness of one of its parts (i.e., a person or group), and this leads him to consider only his abstract vision of the former. Thus in his ideal state women are admitted to "equality" as members of the Guardian class only in so far as they, like their male counterparts, transcend entirely their particular histories and their individual identities.⁶ On the other hand, he backs off his commitment to equality for women without apology or regret when he decides that it wouldn't go over in a real state. The best possible state, he says in The Laws, includes private marriage and family, complete with its traditional Greek inequalities.⁷ In each case (that of the ideal state, and that of the best possible state) Plato assumes that what the good requires can only be good, and so he does not speak of the high human cost of his plans. This assumption, of the impossibility of justice doing harm or of good doing bad, is affirmed throughout Plato's The Republic.

⁶Public Man, Private Woman, pp. 35-41.

⁷The Laws, trans, by Trevor J. Saunders (Penguin, 1970), Book Six, Section 11, 771-777. See also Okin, "Plato on Women and the Family," p. 44-48.

Socrates: "But can the just make men unjust by justice? Or in general, can the good make men bad by means of virtue--is that possible?"
 Polemarchos: "No, impossible."⁸

While Aristotle is rightly praised for his contribution to a participatory ideal of political life, his version of this ideal suffers from the same assumption of concordance made by Plato, his anti-democratic counterpart. Thus Aristotle is able to defend the slavery of women and others as (at least in principle) a just foundation for a good state. Both slavery and the Greek sexual division of labor must, he said, have a foundation in nature (hence can in principle be entirely just) for the simple reason that they are necessary. "There can be no objection in principle to the mere fact that one should command and another obey; that is both necessary and expedient."⁹ Just as "it is a function of nature to provide food for whatever is brought to birth," so nature must have provided the different types of people needed to make a just order.¹⁰ Nature has "its own equilibrium of self-sufficiency."¹¹

⁸The Republic, Book I, p. 134 (Standard Greek Text, p. 335).

⁹The Politics, Book I, Chapter 5.

¹⁰The Politics, Book I, Chapter 11.

¹¹The Politics, Book I, Chapter 9.

While the arguments of Plato and Aristotle mirror in many ways today's debate between those who attack and those who defend the private family and household, their concordance is in some ways very different than that of modern western thinking. There is first of all the low Greek estimation of all of that which is "private," (the appropriately out-of-sight activities of necessity) as opposed to that which is "public" (those "noble," "honorable," and more than merely necessary deeds which are appropriately shared and openly expressed in view of the "entire community"). Thus Aristotle defended the private household, but he in no way endorsed anything like the modern ideal of the family. And there is second of all the difference between the classical assumption of a harmonious and meaningful ordering of the universe and the modern idea of concord as the creation of a meaningful order by means of the activity of human selves. The rise of the modern ideal of the family is connected to this modern privileging of the self. And, not surprisingly, we are typically concerned not so much with the ways our families aid and obstruct us in the creation of some authentic public life (although this concern is not absent) as with the balancing of our desire for family with our wish to enjoy other less binding forms of what is

thought to be "private" (personal, idiosyncratic, without need of public articulation) experience.¹²

Hegel can serve to remind us both of our distance from classical Greece and of the remaining relevance of that time and its discourse. According to Hegel, modern culture's idealization of and ambivalence about family reflects its one-sided glimmerings of the complex nature of "objective freedom," even as Plato's and Aristotle's (very Greek) understanding of family and household as a means reflects another one-sided view.¹³ This "objective freedom," also called "ethical life," is, says Hegel, the

¹²The modern family is of course ambiguously associated with both privacy and freedom. Just as "freedom" can and is used both to refer to a condition where one's family life is allowed and enabled to flourish and also to the ability to escape from one's family and its demands, so "privacy" is used to mean both a kind of protection and rest from the sort of relations that are supposed to prevail in the family, and those very relations themselves. This multiplicity of meaning is, I think, not only the result of the fact that the word "private" is relative -- it attributes to something a degree of closure, autonomy, and/or hiddenness relative to some larger surrounding universe -- and is not the case simply because humans are creatures that need variety. Nor is it a matter of the primacy of individual "choice" in the definition of these concepts. It instead stems from, first, the inegalitarian and not-so-private nature of modern family reality and, second, the problematic, ambiguous, and multiple nature of any conceivable good life.

¹³On Hegel's view of the Greek family see Rudolf J. Siebert, "Hegel's Conception of Marriage and Family: The Origin of Subjective Freedom," Hegels' Social and Political Thought: The Philosophy of Objective Spirit, ed. by Donald Phillip Verene (Humanities Press, 1980), pp. 193-194.

state of affairs that constitutes our complete realization. And world history is by his view the long and complex trip that is needed in order to reach this goal. Each step of the way supposedly has a contribution to make in the interactive (dialectical) development of consciousness and institutions which is paving the way for the ultimate in concord: a fully realized and collectively situated individuality.¹⁴ As it is for Plato and Aristotle so it is for Hegel and for many of the rest of us -- what is just is assumed to be possible, at least in principle.

Hegel's Concept of the Family

The modern underestimation of the public and the ethical is connected, says Hegel, to the enlightenment understanding of freedom as radical autonomy. He calls the latter "subjective freedom," meaning retreat from commitment in the name of freedom and self-development. To Hegel the development of subjective freedom as an aim represents an emancipation from earlier modes of consciousness, but is itself an unstable achievement, in contradiction with itself, ultimately unsatisfying and

¹⁴On Hegel's commitment to modernity, and his attempt to find in it the ingredients for a life "at home," see Raymond Plant "Economic and Social Integration in Hegel's Political Philosophy," Hegels' Social and Political Thought, pp. 59-90.

alienating, and in need of movement to the higher idea of objective freedom.¹⁵ Whereas the be-all and end-all of subjective freedom is the free development and expression of "personality," objective freedom entails a fuller realization of individuality based on a "sacrifice" (transcendence) of "personality" (the will as "desire, need, impulse, and casual whim").¹⁶

If this transcendence of mere contract relations is to take place to any degree in society as a whole, in people's everyday interactions of need and interest, and in the life of the state, it must do so first, says Hegel, in the family. The family, properly speaking, is this transcendence, "with the result that one is in it not as an independent person but as a member."¹⁷ The family is thus a real social community; it is that form of community (ethical life) based on love, based on, in other words, "a feeling for actual living individuals" or "mind's feeling of its own unity."¹⁸

¹⁵For Hegel subjective freedom is an achievement because it recognizes "the right of the human subject to find himself or herself satisfied in his or her particularity." He credits Christianity for making this into a principle of the western world. See Siebert, "Hegel's Concept of Marriage and Family," p. 177.

¹⁶Hegel's Philosophy of Right, trans. by T.M. Knox (Oxford University Press, 1967), Paragraph 37. See para. 36-38.

¹⁷Hegel's Philosophy of Right, para. 158.

¹⁸The first quotatoin is from Hegel's Philosophy of Right, para. 180R. The second is from para. 158.

Love when fully developed is, says Hegel, much more than desire; it is reciprocal recognition. This recognition, achieved through shared activity, is in turn essential for the development of self-consciousness.¹⁹ Freedom requires self-consciousness, and so requires the dependence of love. This is not a contradiction, but only an indication that freedom has a content. To be free is to be liberated from caprice and join in an ethical world; it is the hard won realization of the telos of the self (and it is in this sense that it is "objective").²⁰

Hegel's vision of ethical life includes as a central component not only the valorization but also the regular transcendence of private family life; the family exists only as a moment in a larger whole consisting also of civil society (the realm of economic and social relations) and the state.²¹ Objective freedom requires membership in families, the leaving of and break-up of families, and the

¹⁹Hegel's Philosophy of Right, para. 158A. See also G.W. F. Hegel, "Love," Early Theological Writings, trans. by T.M. Knox (University of Pennsylvania Press, 1948), pp. 304-305. For a discussion of Hegel's notion of "honest, ethical love," see Siebert, "Hegel's Concept of Marriage and Family," pp. 202-204.

²⁰As Joan Landes puts it, for Hegel "the family is situated as an important moment in the development of self-consciousness." "Hegel's Conception of the Family," The Family in Political Thought, ed. by Jean Bethke Elshtain (University of Massachusetts Press, 1982), p. 137.

²¹Hegel's Philosophy of Right, para. 157.

founding of new families.²² And while it exists as an ethical community the individual family allows the father to leave its bounds and have "his actual substantive life in the state, in learning, and so forth, as well as in labour and struggle with the external world."²³

Hegel would not be surprised by or dismiss as unimportant the misgivings we have about our own families, but would criticize them as often one-sided. In a fully realized authentic existence we would come to understand how our misgivings are, in the overall scheme of things, unfounded. We would understand that the ethical life of the family is necessary to, but ultimately inferior to, that which must be realized at the level of the state. The former is immediate ethical life, and the latter is self-conscious ethical life.

This position allows Hegel to achieve insight into the ethical importance of the modern family. He finds value in the way the modern family, by virtue of its basis in the exclusiveness of love, is based on a turning inwards. He points out, following Aristotle, that "inwardness" is

²²"The family" in fact only exists actually as a plurality of families each of which disintegrates as it completes itself in the education of the children to the level of free personality. On the plurality of families see Hegel's Philosophy of Right, para. 181. On the education of children, see para. 177.

²³Hegel's Philosophy of Right, para. 166.

not necessarily opposed to "outwardness," but is instead one if its building blocks. This is because of the human need for concrete and particular relations with meaningful others.

Hegel's version of concordance, in other words, does not equate the good life with the achievement of "the social." He reminds us of the importance, especially in large-scale social systems where fairly impersonal relations necessarily enter into everyday life, of some sort of multiplicity of realms. He understands, for example, the importance of having both the more intimate and the less intimate. In Elshtain's words, "we are all impoverished if all of life falls under a single set of terms."²⁴

Hegel also allows for the fact that the exclusiveness of the modern family has a problematic side. Situated as it is in the midst of all the egoism and struggle of the larger realm of civil society, the family comes to stand as an ideal, as the locus of life that makes the daily struggle worth it. The problem is that this ideal can easily serve to rationalize and reproduce an unjust order. Hegel, like Plato, understands this possibility, and he is furthermore aware of some of modernity's particular propensities to injustice, specifically the tendency of civil society (and so market economies) to develop

²⁴Public Man, Private Woman, p. 335.

conditions of great poverty and inequality, of overproduction and social misery.²⁵

By demonstrating how the family serves to moralize property, Hegel seems to implicitly recognize that the bourgeois family simultaneously mirrors and attempts to conceal from its members the alienated order of property within industrial capitalist society.²⁶

Hegel holds fast, however, to the idea that this order of property is redeemable at least in principle, given that it is bounded properly by the family and the state. The key is that the latter, a self-conscious ethical realm which is based on law rather than feeling, serve to constitute society as a whole as an ethical realm. Then the egoism of civil society is mediated, as it were, from two sides.

[Hegel] envisions the possible realization of free subjectivity which, rather than presupposing antagonisms between individuals, might form the basis of a genuine public community.²⁷

Hegel does this not because of any unwillingness to be critical of his own times, but because of his commitment to concordance -- because, in other words, of his commitment to the idea that a fully redeemable order must be possible and in the cards. Because of this belief, he

²⁵Hegel's Philosophy of Right, para. 243-246.

²⁶Landes, *Hegel's Conception of the Family*, p. 131.

²⁷Landes, "Hegel's Conception of a Family," p. 126.

does not give enough credit to many of the "misgivings" people have about the modern family.

I have in mind two of the determining features of that institution: it is only realized in heterosexual marriage and it is based on the different and complementary functions of the father and the mother. Hegel endorsed these requirements without qualification, saying that it is the father who is to exercise all of the family right over its individuals, just as it is the father alone who enters civil society and represents the unity of the family to others. The mother, on the other hand, "has her substantive destiny in the family."²⁸ It is critical to Hegel's project that women remain on the plane of feeling and the level of particularity, as this enables the family to provide the essential counterbalance to the egoism of civil society.²⁹

In his [Hegel's] view, to allow women to adopt the standpoint of personality and rights in the sphere of civil society would constitute a further regression from the ethical achievements of the ancient polis by accentuating and expanding what he regards as the limited form of bourgeois subjectivity.³⁰

Hegel's position on women, in other words, is his attempt to deal with the problem posed for ethical life by

²⁸Hegel's Philosophy of Right, para. 166.

²⁹Hegel's Philosophy of Right, para. 166, 166A, and 175A.

³⁰Landes, "Hegel's Conception of the Family, p. 134.

the property structure of civil society. And Hegel, like Plato, entertains a vision of a fully rational world, where a unity of the whole and all its parts is achieved without cost, without subjugation, and without imposition. Because of this commitment to concordance, he, like Aristotle, postulates a radical difference in nature between men and women.

Women may have happy ideas, taste, and elegance, but they cannot attain to the ideal. The difference between men and women is like that between animals and plants. Men correspond to animals while women correspond to plants because their development and the principle that underlies it is the rather vague unity of feeling.³¹

This claim is out of keeping with the rest of his theory and undermines his own argument that the family is able to promote the development of self-consciousness and free subjectivity. The ethical life of family is, after all, supposed to require a love founded on reciprocal recognition. "The dialectic of love that Hegel outlines presupposes a relationship between equals in a monogamous love match."³² Yet Hegel is forced, if he is to postulate the family as a moralizing agency and also save concordance, to announce that men and women are anything but equals, thus calling into question how any process of mutual recognition could ever take place.

³¹Hegel's Philosophy of Right, para. 166A.

³²Landes, "Hegel's Conception of the Family," p. 137.

One way to look at Hegel is as simply yet another man endorsing the exclusion of women from his own realm of activity and achievement. He certainly anticipated the arguments of those nineteenth century anthropologists who, even as they rejected patriarchal arguments that the power of the father was a God-given timeless fact of life and the proper model for all forms of authority, refounded male superiority and male prerogative in public matters on more sophisticated evolutionary grounds.³³ Johann J. Bachofen, John McLennan, John Lubbock, Lewis Henry Morgan, and Herbert Spencer were among those who presented the Victorian middle class ideal of family life as "the final culmination, the glorious end-product of man's whole social, sexual, and moral evolution from savagery to civilization."³⁴

³³Patriarchalism was given classic formulation by Sir Robert Filmer and restated in the nineteenth century by Henry Maine. See Elshtain, Public Man, Private Woman, pp. 102-108; Sir Robert Filmer, Patriarcha and Other Political Works, ed. by Peter Laslett (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1949); and Sir Henry Summer Maine, Village Communities in the East and West (London: John Murray, 1887).

³⁴Elizabeth Fee, "The Sexual Politics of Victorian Social Anthropology," Clio's Consciousness Raised: New Perspectives on the History of Women, ed. by Mary Hartman and Lois W. Banner (Harper & Row, 1974), p. 87. See also J.J. Bachofen, Myth, Religion, and Mother Right, trans. by R. Manheim (Princeton University Press, 1967); The Patriarchal Theory; Based on the Papers of the late John Ferguson McLellan, ed. by Donald McLennan (London: McMillan and Co., 1885); Sir John Lubbock, The Origin of Civilization and the Primitive Condition of Man (London: Longmans Green and Co., 1870); Lewis Henry Morgan, Ancient Society, or Researches in the Lines of Human Progress from Savagery, Through Barbarism, to Civilization (Henry Holt & Co., 1877); and Herbert Spencer, The Principles of

By comparison, the traditional patriarchal theory of authority suffered on many counts. It failed to appreciate the appeal of the idea of the family as a bastion of nurturance, tenderness, and morality in a world increasingly dominated by predatory capitalist markets and large organizations. It was contrary to new anthropological evidence and contemporary evolutionary thinking. Finally, it was under attack from a powerful women rights movement.³⁵ To sum up, the new evolutionary theories, like the work of Hegel, fit better with the features of modernity I spoke of in the first two chapters: the new primacy accorded the self, the decline of the family as alliance, and the rise of industrial capitalism.

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Sociology, Works (Osnabrück: Otto Zeller, 1966).

³⁵The latter did not so much challenge the assignment of women to motherhood as strive to garner equal respect and status for mothers, to bring women self-respect through motherhood, and to combine in one world a family life where women could be mothers with a public life where women could be citizens. See Linda Gordon, "Why Nineteenth-Century Feminists Did Not Support 'Birth Control' and Twentieth-Century Feminists Do: Feminism, Reproduction and the Family," Rethinking The Family: Some Feminist Questions, ed. by Barrie Thorn with Marilyn Yalom (Longman, 1982), pp. 40-53, and especially pp. 45-46. Opponents of this feminism welcomed the new evolutionary theories, which seemed to meet the demands of women "half-way" by glorifying motherhood, and the same time as they justified keeping women in the home.

Hegel, then, like these other men has participated in the oppression of women. On the other hand, he defends both the idea of marriage as based on consent rather than compulsion and the idea of the family as a community with no rights over its mature children.³⁶ These ideas should not be reduced to just another means to maintain power over women. Nor should we overlook the fact that Hegel's idea of the self implies a critique of the modern family (and thus of the social construction of gender), just as his ideal of the family and the state as community implies a critique of modern capitalist civil society. The point is (my argument is) that Hegel suppressed these possibilities, and failed to grant that women could attain to "the ideal" and participate in public life, because of his commitment to concordance, and not simply because he wanted women to be at home. Moreover, all who endorse concordance, even if they reject Hegel's particular version of it, are likewise going to overlook, endorse, or provide the theoretical preconditions for various forms of

³⁶The right of the family over its individuals is limited, says Hegel. For one thing "when the family begins to dissolve" family members have rights with regard to each other. They stand in relation to each other as independent persons. Hegel's Philosophy of Right, para. 159. Also the rights of the family are limited because right does not extend to the subjective realm of love but only has sway with regard to the collective property on which the family depends for its necessary external existence. Hegel's Philosophy of Right, para. 159A.

imposition upon the self. Since the various ideas and ideals of family that compete today do, by and large, assume the reality of or the possibility of a true self they, like Hegel, abet forces of normalization and oppression.

The Liberal Celebration of the Modern Family

I now turn to some more contemporary ideas of family. Rather than repeat the literature summaries of others, I take a selective approach and trace the assumptions of concordance and the normalizing implications of a few representative or notable positions.³⁷ Two celebratory ideals of the modern family compete today for predominance: the family of free choice and the "traditional" family of capitalism. I have chosen the work of historian Edward Shorter as an example of the former.

Shorter argues that the history of the family shows how the west has undergone a transformation from a traditional

³⁷One such review is that of Christopher Lasch, who has shown how the celebration of the modern family has proceeded from patriarchal accounts, through evolutionary ones, and on to contemporary social science, where sociologists and psychologists of various schools "discover" the benefits of the validity of the modern family. Lasch argues that these defenses of the family have aided in a gradual process of "the socialization of the means of production." See his Haven in a Heartless World, esp. pp. 22-43. I comment on his view in the next chapter.

society, in which people are less free and have less privacy, to modern society, in which freedom and privacy are more highly valued and protected.³⁸ His account is filled with error and simplicity, but he captures beautifully the appearance and the allure of modernity; he describes perfectly how history has to be seen in order to validate the liberal conception of the self as an autonomous chooser. Shorter in fact gives an organized and scholarly voice to what is probably the most popular view of today's family life. As such, he can hardly be all wrong. Yes, modern society praises and provides "privacy," but for how many of us and on what terms? On the basis of what interventions and given what forms of surveillance? At what cost to the those who are granted this privacy, and at what cost to those who are not?

Shorter casts the onset of modernity as a revolution of choice, both because personal choice has become a major value and because the transformation was itself chosen.

³⁸The Making of the Modern Family, p. 18. According to Shorter, the family of "traditional society" (roughly before 1750) cooperated with (and blended into) the larger community, and both controlled and socialized its young in accordance with the imperatives of the system of social reproduction based on lineage. A host of controls, combined with its role in helping medieval people face death, gave this idea of lineage its power (pp. 5-8). For a similar argument see also Fred Weinstein and Gerald M. Platt, The Wish to be Free: Society, Psyche, and Value Change (Berkeley, 1969), and E.W. Burgess, The Family, with H.J. Locke (New York 1953).

"For modern people, ...the wish to be free triumphs over the community's demands for obedience and conformity."³⁹ He describes this triumph of individual preference as a cutting of ties with kin, community, and past and future generations. It was, he says, the family that initiated this change, and it is for the sake of the family as a domestic unit -- as a center of sentiment -- that it was done. On the other hand, Shorter concludes, the result has been a victory for individuals rather than for families per se. First one group of revolutionaries chose to decide family matters for themselves on the basis of "sentiment" and then a later group (including people today) chose to leave families as often as they make them. The modern family is "the result of replacing property first with sentiment and then with sex as the bond between man and wife."⁴⁰

While Shorter understands important elements of the transition to modernity -- the truisms of family history --his happy story of the modern family has been easily debunked by many.⁴¹ It is in fact by no means clear that

³⁹Shorter, The Making of the Modern Family, p. 18.

⁴⁰The Modern Family, p. 7.

⁴¹Shorter's evidence is weak, his reasoning is sometimes forced, and his claims are not entirely consistent. See the book review of Richard T. Vann (Journal of Family History, 1, no. 1, Autumn, 1976): 106-117, that of Christopher Lasch, "What the Doctor Ordered," New York of Books, 11 (December, 1975): 53, and that of Joan W. Scott, Signs: Journal of Women and Culture in Society, 2, no. 3 (Spring, 1977): 693-696.

affection has become popular only in modernity, that women are entirely better off than before, or that community control over families has decreased.⁴² And in it is certainly wrong to consider the changes that have taken place to be a result simply of choice. Why, then, are his views important? For one thing it is because we can learn a lot about the modern family by criticizing them, but it is mostly because his mistaken assertions are the result of his flawed (concordant) view of self.

Shorter says that the traditional world came apart as a result of the changes wrought by early capitalism, which brought more means to the middle and upper classes and an egoism learned in the marketplace to the lower classes.⁴³ The result was a "sexual revolution" (as indicated by a significant increase in the proportion of childbirths out

⁴²Shorter argues that the people of the medieval west were both less affectionate and less erotic. They supposedly had less sex and did not as a rule value infant life. Additionally, he claims that life was clearly worse for women before the eighteenth century. All this was, he says, a result both of force (legal and informal control) and the influence of cultural climate. A decline in the community's control and presence in the family is, he says, connected to the improvement in the lives of women, as men and women fought for the freedom from community controls to develop the closer and more equal personal ties they wanted (p. 53). On choice and force, see The Modern Family, pp. 44-53, on affection see p. xvii and p. 203, on the question of eroticism, see p. 99, and on the rise of the companionate, "sentimental," and more equal marriage, see pp. 54-78 and 120-167.

⁴³The Modern Family, p. 259.

of wedlock) and a child care revolution, the former occurring first among the proletariat and the latter occurring first among the bourgeoisie.⁴⁴ The upper classes did not give in to the sexual revolution as early as the workers because, says Shorter, their property sustained their loyalty to the system of lineage. They expressed their newly dominant desire for individual gratification in their concern with the welfare of children, while in the lower classes the "wish to be free" awakened by capitalism gave rise in women to the expression of their desire "for personal independence and sexual adventure."⁴⁵

The scholarship of Joan W. Scott, Louise Tilly, and Miriam Cohen has refuted Shorter's interpretation of the rise in the birthrate for single women. To start with, they have established that the single women who bore the children in question were in traditional and dependent

⁴⁴Shorter refers to an "illegitimacy explosion" (among the lower and working classes in France in the period of 1750-1850), but I won't use the term "illegitimate" in this text, to avoid the presumption that children of married parents are somehow more legitimate than others. While there seems to have indeed been an increase in the number of births by single women at the time in question, Shorter probably exaggerated the change and it may not have been the first such large sustained increase in Western history, as he claims. See Vann's book review, pp. 109-111.

⁴⁵The Modern Family, p. 261.

positions of employment and also away from home at the time.

The mothers of bastards were most often servants. And servanthood did not make women economically independent, for all of Shorter's wish that it did. Quite the contrary. The nature of work, the low wages, and the fact that wages were paid at the end of service combined to make servant girls economically dependent on the households in which they worked.⁴⁶

Shorter's response is that these women were being impregnated mostly by men of their own class, not by their employers. "If, therefore, women didn't sleep with these men because they had to, it must have been because they wanted to."⁴⁷ This may be so, but the question is: why would they want to? According to Scott, Tilly, and Cohen, many women were promised marriage and, for economic reasons, they needed marriage. Far from a rebellion against the old order, many liaisons were a desperate attempt to continue to live in the traditional way. "In most cases, families strategically adapted their established practices to the new context."⁴⁸ It is true

⁴⁶See Scott's book review, and also Louise A. Tilly, Joan W. Scott, and Miriam Cohen, "Women's Work and European Fertility Patterns," Journal of Interdisciplinary History, VI, 3 (Winter 1976): 447-476.

⁴⁷Shorter, The Modern Family, p. 157.

⁴⁸Tilly, Scott and Cohen, "Women's Work," p. 454. See also p. 465, and Louise A. Tilly, "Individual Lives and Family Strategies in the French Proletariat," Journal of Family History, 4, no. 2 (Summer 1979): 137-151. One such adaptation occurred when daughters who had left home for work sent their money home. The attempt was to find a new way to maintain the family ties and, of course, survive.

that old constraints of family, local church, and community broke down as a result of population growth and above all a new mobility, but women hardly experienced this as emancipating. Instead more women than ever "with inadequate wages and unstable jobs found themselves caught in a cycle of poverty which increased their vulnerability."⁴⁹ More men could make a promise of marriage with no intention of keeping it.⁵⁰ (For similar reasons many women, especially lower-class women, are equally vulnerable today -- the contemporary rise in unwanted births and abortions is not the result of a freely chosen new sexual adventurism!)

It is not at all clear that these changes led to more sex. Jean-Louis Flandrin turns the tables entirely on

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Many daughters did, however, lose touch with their families, and this of course must have helped change some attitudes as well. In the long run the new context spelled the end for the family as a productive unit consisting of more than one generation.

⁴⁹"Women's Work," p. 463.

⁵⁰Jean-Louis Flandrin agrees, pointing out that, while in the seventeenth century families of seduced (or raped) women could force the seducer to marry the seduced, this became unenforceable in the eighteenth century, due to the church's opposition. "Thus, the rise of illegitimacy in this age is not in any sense evidence of women's sexual liberation: on the contrary, it seems to be evidence of greater difficulty in effecting marriage with the men they had intercourse with." "Repression and Change in the Sexual Life of Young People in Medieval and Early Modern Times," Journal of Family History, 2, no. 3 (Fall 1977): 203.

Shorter's argument by claiming that an increased repression of sex helped cause the rise in births out of marriage while leading at the same time to an increased eroticization of life. A threatened church, says Flandrin, began to repress traditional forms of supervised sex among young people and this, combined with the closing of municipal brothels and (as discussed above) the migration of more poor young women to towns looking for jobs, led to the increased births out of marriage.⁵¹

Whether there was more or less sex, it seems highly simplistic to understand the changes that did take place as "sexual liberation." More sex is not the same as more sexual freedom (as many women discovered as a result of their experience in "the sexual revolution" of the fifties and sixties) any more than less sex necessarily means more repression. As Flandrin suggests and Foucault argues, both the denial of sexual urges and their celebration can lead to an increase in the self-analysis of one's desire and thereby to its transformation and its intensification. What we have had, perhaps, is not a sexual revolution but a "sexuality" revolution.

There are similar problems with Shorter's simplistic claims of an increase in power for women, love for infants and children, and privacy for everybody. On the first

⁵¹"Repression and Change," p. 207.

point he overlooks two facts. While three hundred years ago women were defined as inferior to men, they were not relegated, as they generally are today, to the non-productive, relatively less visible, and socially isolated household.⁵² On the other hand, modernity has burdened women (and men) anew by projecting onto them idealized images that they can not live up to. The "revolution" praised by Shorter meant that women were idealized as "submissive, selfless, ceaselessly effective on behalf of others," and men were given the sole responsibility to ensure the family's economic success.⁵³

On the second point (the question of love for infants and children), Shorter first of all depends on the questionable view that the popularity of the often deadly practice of wet-nursing was due to a lack of interest in infants, when it was just as much the result of ignorance about disease and economic necessity.⁵⁴ Shorter second of

⁵²Tilly, Scott and Cohen argue that "women in these [traditional] families were neither dependent nor powerless" ("Women's Work," p. 454). For a converse view, see Mary Beth Norton, "The Evolution of White Women's Experience in Early America," in American Historical Review, LXXXIX (1984): 593-619.

⁵³See John Demos, Past, Present, and Personal, p. 12 and pp. 41-67. For a longer study on the effects on the contemporary family of the imposition of the breadwinner and homemaker roles see Richard Sennett and Jonathan Cobb, The Hidden Injuries of Class (New York: Vintage Books, 1972).

⁵⁴For Shorter's view, see The Making of the Modern Family, p. 175. For opposing arguments see George D. Sussman, "The End of the Wet-Nursing Business in France, 1874-1914," Journal of Family History, 2, no. 3 (Fall 1977): 255, and

all makes a judgment about the past based on a modern understanding of childhood. Here the argument of Phillipe Ariès is important, for he seems at first to agree with Shorter's thesis. Ariès argues that indifference existed because "nobody thought, as we ordinarily think today, that every child contained a man's personality."⁵⁵ *Centuries of Childhood*, p. 39. This statement is of course literally false, and insulting to women. Many people today think (incorrectly, in many respects) that female children contain a woman's personality.^f There was, says Ariès, no concept of child personality of any kind. People went from being disposable and vulnerable infants, to being little adults.⁵⁶ Children were depicted in art as little adults, they mixed with adults in everyday activities, and were given adult responsibilities very early. Childhood, says Ariès, is a modern invention.

Ariès throws into question Shorter's conflation of the medieval absence of a concern with childhood with the period's apparent relative indifference to infant life. To Shorter, both were the result of the same absence of affect. But this suggests that a rise in sentiment led us

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Scott, Book Review, p. 695.

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⁵⁶Centuries of Childhood, p. 38.

to conceive of childhood.⁵⁷ Why would this be the case? It seems more likely that a new concern for infant life resulted from changes in life expectancy and changed attitudes, which in turn resulted from a new focus on children. The new concern is perhaps for the best overall, but the changes which led to it were hardly the result of a liberation of affection.

We should take a clue from the fact that, as Shorter argues, the community of the system of lineage had no interest in each child as an individual, only in the existence of heirs. This should lead us, however, to ask not only about the liberation that resulted from the decline of the system of lineage, but also to wonder at what new interests society had in maximizing and managing the development of the individual. In other words, what was at the stake in the rise of "childhood?"

⁵⁷Ariès' alternative explanation is a bit contradictory. On the one hand, he says that the "indifference was a direct and inevitable consequence of the demography of the period" (Centuries of Childhood, p. 39). In other words, it was because so many children died and there were plenty to replace them. Why, however, should indifference be an "inevitable" result of high mortality rates? On the other hand, Ariès points to a growing influence of the Christian doctrine of the immortality of every soul, the transformation of formal education, and the rise of more urban and capitalist modes of life, as reasons for the new importance of the child personality (p. 43). In saying this Ariès raises questions about his own statement concerning the "inevitability" of medieval indifference to infant life, especially since the Church's started to change its tune before the change in demographic conditions.

Elites led the way in developing a new concern for childhood and domesticity, and they did so neither as a simple expression of preferences newly set free, nor in order to provide a substitute for a sexual revolution they thought the middle classes should resist, but as a response to the same changes in the social and economic order that led to the rise in births out of wedlock. Christopher Lasch remarks, "This withdrawal [from community life] ...took place not because family life became warmer and more attractive, as Shorter thinks, but because the outside world came to be seen as more forbidding."⁵⁸

Lasch emphasizes the role of elites in this process -- the new "privacy" was in part imposed on people, as "the forces of organized virtue, led by feminists, temperance advocates, educational reformers, penologists, doctors, and bureaucrats" went on a "campaign to establish the family as the seat of civic virtue".⁵⁹ The family was championed as "a haven in a heartless world."⁶⁰ Lasch is quite clear about the political implications of this.

In urging a retreat to private satisfactions, the custodians of domestic virtue implicitly acknowledged capitalism's devastation of all forms of collective

⁵⁸"What the Doctor Ordered," p. 51.

⁵⁹"What the Doctor Ordered," p. 51.

⁶⁰See Lasch, Haven in a Heartless World: The Family Besieged, p. 6.

life, while at the same time they discouraged attempts to repair the damage by depicting it as the price that had to be paid for material and moral improvement.⁶¹

Shorter, then, is misleading on the third point as well. Modern privacy, for all of its real benefits, was granted to people on certain conditions, namely that the right "healthy" sorts things be done in private. This is of course in keeping with the work of Foucault and Donzelot, who argue the rise of "domesticity" seen by Shorter as a surge of sentiment was in fact based in the imposition of new disciplines upon the bourgeoisie by members of their own class. Similarly, by their account the "sexual liberation" of the working classes was purchased only at a price. New possibilities for the proletariat have indeed come to be, but by virtue of a process linked to the weakening of the system of alliance. This has meant a considerable degree of hardship, particularly for women (as we have seen). There should be no mistake: to some degree new chains were put in the place of the old.

Conflicts were necessary ...in order for the proletariat to be granted a body and a sexuality; economic emergencies had to arise ...; lastly, there had to be established a whole technology of control which made it possible to keep that body and sexuality, finally conceded to them, under surveillance⁶²

⁶¹"What the Doctor Ordered," p. 51.

⁶²The History of Sexuality, Vol. 1, p. 126.

Shorter's liberal assumptions distort not only his vision of the making of the modern family, but also his interpretation of the contemporary situation. He for example endorses a face value reading of today's hedonism as a logical extension of the evolution toward greater and greater freedom. At first, says Shorter, "the wish to be free emerges [among men and women] as romantic love."⁶³ It has since supposedly led to a more directly instrumental hedonism, where sex is the major bond for couples -- "men and women come together and wrench apart as freight cars do in a switching yard."⁶⁴ In general Shorter accepts a consistent decline in emotional intensity and community activity as natural. By his reading, people who are free choose to cut their ties with others, as if to stay free. For Shorter the latest in this line of natural and unproblematic development is the understanding of parents as a kind of friend to their children, rather than an educator or representative of the

⁶³The Modern Family, p.259. This romantic love is understood by Shorter to be egoistic in nature, as can be glimpsed in the following hasty and simplistic remarks: "Love at first sight means you are falling in love with your mother,"The Modern Family, p. 156. and "You look into another person's eyes in the hope that you'll find yourself."The Modern Family, p. 259.

⁶⁴The Modern Family, p. 8.

lineage.⁶⁵ This, says Shorter, has had the result of making the peer group important once again -- this time not as a representative of the demands of the community, but as a teenage subculture that "is independent of adult values."⁶⁶

Shorter endorses the individualist instrumentalism he describes, first by reassuring his readers that the family is not breaking up because love is still connected to sex and people who get divorced usually turn around and remarry, and second by privileging the "modern system of values" as freely chosen.⁶⁷ We need, not, of course, follow him in this celebration, but unless we challenge his view of self we can do little besides follow him in the acceptance of the current situation as inevitable -- people are not likely to give up their newly found power to choose. At best we could advocate repressive legislation in order to shore up "traditional values," and this is -- by his reading of self -- likely to be ineffective.

In other words, Shorter's brand of concordance leaves us with the options of celebration or despair. We can celebrate the modern family as an expression of free

⁶⁵The Modern Family, p. 276.

⁶⁶The Modern Family, p. 276.

⁶⁷See The Modern Family, p. 278 and p. 21, respectively.

choice, or reluctantly accept it for the same reason. Either way an important facet of politics is ruled out: there can be no collective consideration of the different ways "family" and "freedom" can be construed and constructed. Politics can only be the self-interested struggle or accommodation between free beings, and those not at home with this had by this reading best try to find an "enclave" where they can be as they like or with whom they like.⁶⁸

The fact is, however, that a language of self-interest, self-development, and self-expression cannot adequately characterize the commitments and practices of most of us, even if it is by that language that we struggle to articulate a vision of ourselves.⁶⁹ Shorter himself is much more confused about the issue of agency than his ringing conclusions about the victory of free choice indicate.⁷⁰ Modern instrumentalism is neither as simple

⁶⁸On the reduction of community to "lifestyle enclave" in American culture, see Robert N. Bellah, Richard Madsen, William M. Sullivan, Ann Swidler, and Steven M. Tipton, Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life (Harper & Row, 1985), pp. 71-75.

⁶⁹"People frequently live out a fuller sense of purpose in life, than they can justify in rational terms ..." Robert N. Bellah, et. al., Habits of the Heart (Harper & Row, 1985), p. 6.

⁷⁰On the one hand, Shorter speaks of modern "egoism" as "learned in the marketplace" and as required by the larger order (The Modern Family, p. 259). On the other hand, the "variety of economic egoism" taught by the marketplace is spoken of as "the sexual and emotional wish to be free", and as "individual self-fulfillment" (p. 259), and the end of traditional society is described as a lifting of

and straightforward nor as thoroughly victorious as Shorter believes. Nor does a vision of politics as bargaining begin to get at the ways our lives are bound up with power, involved with conflict, and fatally linked to the unsettled and the ambiguous.

Some Critique of the Modern Family

In the last chapter I discussed the work of Ranya Rapp and of Michèle Barrett and Mary McIntosh. Compared to Shorter they accord a more central role in their explanation to forces of economic constraint, and I hope it is clear that I think they are right in this and that I think that this difference is important. On the other hand I also spoke there of how Barrett and McIntosh's idea of the family as "anti-social" is reductionist, and so fails to fully explain the appeal of the family ideal. I also said that their understanding of power as oppression allows them to be somewhat naively enamored of "the social" as the proper realm of genuine existence. On these issues the distinction between their critique and Shorter's celebration disappears somewhat. For Shorter the family is disappearing into the social at this very moment; for Barrett and McIntosh this is instead the hoped

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for result of political action. In either case concordance is assumed; power is thought of primarily as oppression, the family is understood in terms of only one of its facets, and the possibility of a fully liberated existence is assumed.

These assumptions are not unique to these particular theories, but are widespread in liberal and radical social thought on the modern family. Both tend, in other words, to take some of the worst from Hegel and leave out the best. Friedrich Engels provides an important example from the critical tradition; while his outdated speculative history has been for the most part rejected, his reasoning remains more or less foundational.⁷¹

⁷¹Engels, The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State (Chicago, Charles H. Kerr & Co., Cooperative, 1902). Engels' work is based on Lewis H. Morgan's Ancient Society. One of the "others" (besides Barrett and McIntosh) who similarly looks forward to the achievement of a genuine social existence is the early Eli Zaretsky. In his Capitalism, The Family and Personal Life he argues that one day, when alienated labor is abolished, the family and the personal will be transformed into "autonomous life activity," (Harper & Row, 1976, p. 140). Supposedly the fulfillment of personal needs will no longer be restricted to the family but diffused "throughout the entire society -- and particularly throughout the world of work" (p. 141). It is worth noting that Zaretsky's use of the phrase "autonomous life activity" is similar to Marx's use of "species-being," which refers to the level of being whereby the individual human is both totally socialized and completely emancipated. For a critique of this idea as denial of humans as complex, historically situated, and language using, see Elshtain, Public Man, Private Woman, pp. 189-195.

According to Engels, there have been three main forms of the family, the final one being the patriarchal monogamy of "civilization."⁷² By this view the rise of private property destroyed equality between the sexes as well as a "primitive" economic equality.⁷³ New sources of conflict came into being (above all class conflict), and the state became necessary to manage conflict. Since it was men who controlled the new private property (why is not all that clear), the state became the protector of men's oppression of women. Conversely, where there is no property (in a future socialism), the family, says Engels, tends towards "free love relations," by which he seems to mean a serial monogamy entered into on equal terms by men and women, with no child-rearing or household work to complicate matters (these are left to "social industry"). Women, he goes on, will become full members of the productive sphere, and "sex-love" will blossom (capitalists supposedly keep the proletarian family from going further in this direction than it has already).⁷⁴

This formula has concordance written all over it. One kind of concordance is evident in Engels' idea of oppression (which is taken more or less directly from

⁷²Engels, The Origin of the Family, p. 90

⁷³The Origin of the Family, p. 91.

⁷⁴The Origin of the Family, pp. 91-92.

Marx). The modern family is, as he sees it, simply one part of a larger system of "separations" imposed by the capitalist system of private property. These include separations of class, of individuals (who are estranged from one another), of public and private (upon which is based a unequal separation of gender), and of state and society. Thus the state, private property, class struggle, the oppression of women, and the instrumental treatment of humans by other humans are assumed to be neatly linked. They are all explained by the same principle -- the imperatives of the productive system (largely equated with the interests of the capitalist class). All forms of oppression are, in other words, thought to be in concord with one another.⁷⁵

⁷⁵This kind of concordance leads to serious kinds of reductionism. Jane Humphries, in the context of a discussion of the working-class family, points out how Engels' reduction of the family into the means for the transmission of private property has too often been replaced only by the definition of the family solely in terms of its functions in the reproduction of labor power and the provision of domestic labor (for an example of the literature she is referring to, see Terry Fee, "Domestic Labour: An Analysis of Housework and its Relation to the Production Process," Review of Radical Political Economics 8 (Spring, 1976)). In fact one cannot explain all features of the social world by referring to the interests of the ruling class. Humphries argues that to reduce the family to its functions in serving economic imperatives is to fail to respect the possibility that the working class is not entirely powerless, that features of the social world are the result of resistance by them rather than the successful exercise of power by capitalists. See "The Working-Class Family: A Marxist Perspective," p. 198-201. For similar criticism see Jane Flax, "The Family in Contemporary Feminist Thought: A Critical Review," in The Family in Political Thought, pp. 236-237, and Eli

For Engels the overthrow of the unified forces of oppression gives rise to its counterpart, the unified and harmonious reality of liberation. By his view, nothing that is fundamental to identity will be imposed on humans once private property is abolished; our determining conditions will be freely chosen. "Man's own social organisation, hitherto confronting him as a necessity imposed by nature and history, now becomes the result of his own free action."⁷⁶ It is striking how much this vision of the future is like Shorter's naive interpretation of the present. In both cases a concord is thought to exist at the level of the liberated self.

Michael Sandel has pointed out how this notion of liberation as the end of determination and necessity denies to us the very conditions that would have to pertain if we are even to be selves that could be in some

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Zaretsky, Capitalism, The Family & Personal Life, pp. 93-94. On another important note, many feminists have rightly pointed out that the insistence of the unity of all interests in one struggle has assisted socialists in their failure to challenge the traditional sexual division of labor. It has also helped permit them to take for granted as natural the constructs of "masculinity" and "femininity." See Barrett and McIntosh, The Anti-social Family, p. 18.

⁷⁶"Socialism: Utopian and Scientific," The Marx-Engels Reader, Second Edition, ed. by Robert C. Tucker (New York, W.W. Norton, 1978), p. 715. See also the similar views of Marx, The German Ideology, Part 1 (New York: International Publishers, 1978), pp. 52-57.

sense liberated. Engels' brand of freedom is entirely separate from, and incompatible with, what Sandel argues are the "encumbrances" or "constitutive attachments," that derive their special force from their connection to personal identity and which are necessary to character, self-knowledge and friendship. These are the constraints of familial, ethnic, economic, national, and cultural (in a word, historical) determination.⁷⁷

Sandel's work is, I think, consistent with a philosophy of discordance, even if he does not take such a position outright. His criticism of the liberal idea of autonomous choice applies with equal force to Engels' notion of liberation. Neither is possible and neither is desirable, for both dispense with the idea of identity. By definition nothing entirely freely chosen is part of one's identity. "For to have character is to know that I move in a history I neither summon nor command ..."⁷⁸ Multiple determinations give us each our own personal history, make us each unique, and gives rise to reflective consideration and conflict concerning shared meanings.

My final example in this section is provided by a classic of early radical feminism: Shulamith Firestone's

⁷⁷Liberalism and the Limits of Justice (Cambridge University Press, 1982), pp. 179-183.

⁷⁸Sandel, Liberalism and The Limits of Justice, p. 179.

The Dialectic of Sex.⁷⁹ Firestone holds, on the one hand, that the oppression of women is historically universal and entirely determined due to the biological natures of "male" and "female," and, on the other hand, that women's liberation is the transition to a world where there reigns an agency entirely free of social determination and oppression.⁸⁰ History up to now has, she argues, been determined by the fact of "sex-class" (said to be inevitable given the fact of that women bear children). In terms of power history is described as the ubiquitous reign of "patriarchy," the rule of the male class over the female. She believes, however, that women's liberation is possible by virtue of the technological overcoming of biological difference (the replacement of pregnancy with the cultivation of babies in the laboratory). Once political action makes this new possibility into a reality, we can put an end to all oppression and hierarchy, even to the point where children bargain as equal partners in households created by contract.⁸¹

⁷⁹The Dialectic of Sex: The Case for Feminist Revolution, (The Women's Press, 1979).

⁸⁰The Dialectic of Sex, pp. 9-12. These ideas are widespread in radical feminism, albeit in different forms. See Elshtain's discussion in Public Man, Private Woman, pp. 204-228.

⁸¹The Dialectic of Sex, p. 233. For a discussion of how the language of exchange relationships pervades Firestone's vision of the future, even as she understands "total freedom" to be identical to "total community," see Elshtain, Public Man, Private Woman, pp. 219-221.

Firestone, like Engels, Shorter, and Barrett and McIntosh, uses an untenable idea of freedom to support the view of the family as an oppressive necessity which is being, or should be, made obsolete by historical progress.⁸² Humans are discussed as if they could move from a condition where choice does not operate at all to one where it operates free from any kind of determination.⁸³ Firestone, again like the others, has a thin view of the role of family in the creation of selves and social life, as if it were an entirely protean form connected to children and long-term obligation only by economic necessity. What Jean Elshtain says of Engels could as well be said of them all; "Nowhere does one find a complex, self-reflective subject in his account of the past, his descriptions of the present, or his paeans to

⁸²Christopher Lasch has shown that this has become a commonplace of liberal academics as well as of radical critique (Haven in a Heartless World, pp. 22-43). Talcott Parsons, for example, says that the family will have to go through a painful transition on its way to being a "unity of interacting personalities," that is, a locus of voluntary cooperation for mutual satisfaction (See Elshtain's discussion of the similarities between Parsons and Engels in Public Man, Private Women, pp. 259-260).

⁸³Elshtain rightly points to the "amoral consequentialism" this gives rise to in the theory of Marx and Engels. Both applaud the destruction of those peoples and cultures deemed obsolete in the march to the time when people will finally make their own history. See Elshtain, Public Man, Private Woman, p. 263, and Karl Marx, "On Imperialism in India," The Marx-Engels Reader, Second Edition, Robert C. Tucker, ed. (New York: W.W. Norton & Co, 1978), pp. 653-664.

the future."⁸⁴ None allow for a vision of humans as permanently in a condition of being both makers and made, as speaking beings who come to have choices, desires and visions only by means of a language which also delimits and determines. As a result, none understand the importance the idea of family has today as a locus where the aspiration for moral community is kept alive, albeit in a tentative, vulnerable, politically disempowering, exclusive, and so far fairly ineffective form.

Normalization and the "Traditional Family"

Prior to the last section I discuss Shorter's somewhat despairing liberal "celebration" of the modern family. It is important also that I speak of an alternative sort of celebration which is much more overtly critical and much less passive with regard to the current situation. This is the increasingly popular "conservative" view, according to which a moral order is possible providing that we (among other things) restore the "traditional" family to its rightful place of honor and dominance. I have chosen George Gilder and Michael Novak as representatives of this view, not because their arguments are typical but because they are especially thoroughgoing. By pushing the logic of the conservative position to its limits, they bring out

⁸⁴Public Man, Private Woman, p. 262.

its best and its worst points. Like Hegel, they affirm truths that have some radical or critical import, and then suppress them in their effort to find the elements of the good life within reach. This means on one level an opening to discordance and on another level the reassertion of concordance. On the one hand they affirm life as necessarily inclusive of injustice, sacrifice, burden, and pain. Similarly, the modern family is understood not as an alliance freely entered into but as a system of discipline one is born into. On the other hand, it is equally affirmed that this travail and discipline poses no fundamental ambiguities; it is, or can be, instead an opportunity for moral redemption. The family is touted as both the proper school for moral development and the proper locus for its satisfactory fruition. In the process Gilder and Novak assert the naturalness both of capitalism and the particular version of family dominant in capitalism.

I begin with Gilder. He rejects both the idea that humans are motivated by rational calculations of self-interest and the notion that society is a simple aggregate of individual desires, demands and aptitudes. He sees people instead as ethical beings, and holds that for any society to survive it requires in its participants some shared faith in the moral goodness of its own reality:

past, present, and future.⁸⁵ Such faith must be established in the face of a discordant world. Life, says Gilder, is based on chance, marked by ascension and decline, and hedged in by insecurity.

The tale of human life is less the pageant of unfolding rationality and purpose envisioned by the enlightenment than a saga of desert wanderings and brief bounty, the endless dialogue between man and God, between alienation and providence, as we search for the ever-rising and receding promised land, which we can see most clearly ...when we have the faith and courage to leave ourselves open to chance and fate.⁸⁶

These references to "man" and "God" indicate already that Gilder has some ideas about how we can provide a morally just mode of balancing security and risk, inspiring faith, and dealing with life's ups and downs. In fact he is quite specific -- we need both "capitalism" (a dynamic process of "gift-giving" and "creative destruction" carried out by "heroic entrepreneurs") and "the family" (the nuclear family where the father is the sole or primary economic provider).⁸⁷ The combination of

⁸⁵See Wealth and Poverty (New York: Bantam Books, 1981), p. 26 and more generally, Chapter Three, "The Returns of Giving," pp. 23-42, and Chapter Five, "The Nature of Wealth," pp. 64-82.

⁸⁶George Gilder, Wealth and Poverty, pp. 314-315.

⁸⁷On the capitalist nature of the "good society" see Wealth and Poverty, pp. 7-8. Gilder defines capitalism only as a system where "productive wealth is diversely controlled and can be freely risked in new causes" (Wealth and Poverty, p. 6), as "a circle of giving" (p. 27), but he clearly understands this "diversity" and "freedom" in traditional entrepreneurial ways. See Chapter Three, "The Returns of Giving," pp. 23-42, and Chapter Five, "The Nature of Wealth," pp. 64-82.

the two can, he says, provide the particular forms of moral discipline whereby chance and uncertainty are made into the basis of moral redemption. We are, in other words, saved from discord (and from a good deal of politics) by a deep concord that exists between the (opposite but complementary) natures of men and women on the one hand and the requirements of the production of wealth on the other.

To be even more specific, Gilder tells us that capitalism (and so morality itself) requires classes, social stigma for the poor, and the economic dependence of individual women upon individual men within family-based households. For all of this he makes no apologies and has no regrets. This is because he believes that the differences of class can function together with, first, the productive channeling of men's sexual energy into the familial role of provider and, second, the societal harnessing of women's maternal instincts so that work is properly rewarded, solutions are found to society's problems, and people's faith in the order is redeemed.⁸⁸

⁸⁸Women, says Gilder, will be most fulfilled if they accept the loss of independence that allows their motherhood to flourish. Men, on the other hand are "the weaker sex," and each will defer gratification and work hard only if he is the sole provider, without special outside help (welfare), for a wife and kids. Wealth and Poverty, Chapter Eleven, "The Coming Welfare Boom," pp. 139-154.

If class, stigma, and family function as they should, then (says Gilder) there will always be poverty, but no one group will be "stuck" there, and both wealth and poverty will be morally redeemed.

We are not, Gilder warns, currently in the correct disciplinary situation. The booming welfare state and foolish government policy have interfered (supposedly) with the process of sublimation and creativity, thus creating a dependent, fearful, defensive populace and a smaller economic pie. We need to firm things up so as to enforce the proper norms of behavior. He recommends that we shore up male-headed monogamous marriage through serious cuts in social welfare programs and implement supply-side style cuts in taxes and regulations in order to give room for heroic entrepreneurs.⁸⁹

Gilder's work suffers from a reliance on bad socio-biology and bad economics. Regarding biology, numerous men and women both reject Gilder's view of their natures and fail to conform to his role prescriptions and yet

⁸⁹See Wealth and Poverty, Chapter Six, "The Nature of Poverty," pp. 83-94, and Chapter 21, "The Necessity for Faith," pp. 304-315. Daniel Bell makes an argument similar to Gilder's in The Cultural Contradictions of Capitalism (New York: Basic Books, 1976), pp. 232-236. See also Bell's The Coming of Post-Industrial Society (New York, Basic Books, 1973). For a critical reading of Bell that in some respects applies to Gilder as well, see William E. Connolly, Appearance and Reality in Politics (Cambridge University Press, 1981), pp. 142-145.

somehow manage to work hard, make commitments and have faith.⁹⁰ When it comes to economics, only a naiveté about structural factors and about political power can sustain the idea that the lack of social mobility and rightful reward in our class system are the fault simply of wrongful welfare and tax policy. In fact changes that encompass the global economy have rendered old patterns of mobility in the U.S. more or less obsolete, not to mention left the one-breadwinner family in dire straights.⁹¹ In short, people are not going to return to "work, family and faith" because of a few policy changes or after reading Gilder's blandishments.

At another level, Gilder is probably naive with regard to the foundations of "the American dream." Can the legitimacy of capitalism be sustained after it is acknowledged (as Gilder acknowledges) that it leads neither to equality nor security? Gilder, like other neo-conservatives, argues for the necessity of a restored faith in the future and a shared commitment to the whole without providing much in the way of reasons why people

⁹⁰I provide one example. I have spent a number of years working hard in a variety of ways without being the "breadwinner" in my household (although I must admit I could be better at saving money).

⁹¹See Harrington, The New American Poverty, especially pp. 123-150.

should have such faith and commitment.⁹² Can a world where's one's class position is insecure even though it is "earned" really be seen as morally justified? The answer, in a highly stratified society like ours, where those near the bottom suffer, is "no." Those who "succeed" fortify their positions with the help of government and those who are at the bottom tend to either internalize a judgment against themselves or turn to politics and demand some redress. These demands are then threats to the shared vision of the morality of the system, thus setting in motion the imposition of various disciplines to enforce class difference and social stigma. The subsidies for the middle and upper groups go largely unchallenged or unnoticed, while even the crumbs going to the lower groups are resented and challenged. "Assistance" is tailored so as to tear apart the living arrangements of the poor and encourage them in the direction of relatively self-destructive means of dealing with their situation. "Work incentives" and the like are introduced to make welfare punitive.

Gilder, then, is naive finally about the political import of the "anti-family" provisions of the welfare system which he seeks to reform. These provisions promote

⁹²This is also true of, for example, Daniel Bell's The Cultural Contradictions of Capitalism (New York: Basic Books, 1977).

the very family values they seem to contradict. The imposition of an utter lack of independence is part of the system of tutelage which, while it fails on its own terms in that it does not utilize all bodies directly in employment, nonetheless succeeds in providing an a threatening alternative to the normalized world of contract. The example of the "welfare family" serves an essential role in the maintenance of the norm of the middle-class family. Because Gilder's analysis considers the imposition of particular disciplines of class and gender on people to be entirely in accord with nature and justice, it provides the perfect theoretical justification for the punitive imposition of these distinctions. People may return to "work, family, and faith," and may thereby come to see their world as moral, but only at great cost to many, including themselves, and only in the context of various disciplinary pressures. The background requirements of Gilder's program are marginalization, mental health treatment, institutionalization and incarceration; if it is implemented successfully this will mean self-loathing for some and a nervous kind of self-congratulation for others.

In sum, the costs and requirements of maintaining both adequate levels of production and high levels of inequality are either lost on Gilder or thought to be

entirely in accord with nature and morality. He denies that capitalism or industrialism have any intrinsic problems, instead asserting that we need only the will and fortitude that brings "creative" (strictly traditional capitalist) solutions. This is supposedly possible thanks to the moral nature of chance, fate, and sexual nature. An assumption of concordance is, then, a fundamental prop of his theory.

Michael Novak's argument is much more palatable to liberal, feminist, and radical ears than Gilder's. This is because Novak does not mix in supply-side economics or define "the family" in the same narrow anti-female terms. By his terms many different household patterns can qualify as a moral family. On the other hand, he is much like Gilder when it comes to the one-sidedness (lack of ambiguity) in his defense of family and the unqualified nature of his acceptance of capitalist order.

Even more so than Gilder, Novak sees the extra-familial world of capitalism as discordant, although the word he uses is "unjust."

The world around the family is fundamentally unjust. The state and its agents, and the economic system and its agencies, are never to be fully trusted."⁹³

⁹³Novak, "The Family Out of Favor," Harper's Magazine, 252, no. 1511 (April 1976), pp. 37-44.

Novak goes on to say more specifically that the capitalist world, by virtue of its mobility, its hedonism, its work life, its systems of transportation, and its wealth, is anti-family, and this even though it depends on the "hard, work, competition, sacrifice, saving, and rational decision making" nurtured by the family.⁹⁴

At an advanced stage capitalism imparts enormous centrifugal forces to the souls of those who have most internalized its values; and these forces shear marriages and families apart.⁹⁵

Novak contrasts the sweetness and light of the family to the conflict and pain of the extra-familial world. He says "What strengthens the family strengthens society," and "if things go well with the family, life is worth living; when the family falters, life falls apart."⁹⁶

Of course there is the possibility that this is unfortunately true given capitalist and/or industrialist realities. Novak makes some good points along these lines. There is, for example, his conception of a "realist" understanding which associates liberation "with the concrete toils of involvement with family or familial communities."⁹⁷ He has a healthy sense of the

⁹⁴"The Family Out of Favor, p. 37 and p. 38.

⁹⁵"The Family Out of Favor," p. 37. See also p. 43.

⁹⁶"The Family Out of Favor," p. 38.

⁹⁷"The Family Out of Favor," p. 40.

inevitability in life of dirt, necessity and death. To have this sense is to have experienced "moral development," and for this the family is, he says, essential.⁹⁸

The point of marriage and family is to make us realistic. For it is one of the secrets of the human spirit that we long not to be of earth, not to be bound by death, routine, and the drag of our bodies.⁹⁹

Here Novak echoes Hauerwas and Noddings in emphasizing the lessons learned through obligation to and dependence on specific others to whom one is tied.¹⁰⁰ And, in the context of industrial society, this has by and large meant families. I am sure that Novak is on firm empirical ground when he says that strong family life of some kind is fundamental in almost every instance of "success," however defined -- "educational achievement ...the development of stable and creative personalities ...intellectual and artistic aspiration ...," etc.¹⁰¹

On the other hand, Novak never criticizes the family on a single score. Nowhere, for example, does he say that the we should not have to rely so heavily on families. Yes, family life is sometimes hard, painful, and costly,

⁹⁸"The Family Out of Favor," p. 39.

⁹⁹"The Family Out of Favor, p. 40.

¹⁰⁰"The Family Out of Favor," p. 41.

¹⁰¹"The Family Out of Favor," p. 42.

but this is entirely for the good, by his account. This stretches credulity, and, more importantly, it provides a critical prop for the legitimacy of the harsh extra-familial world of class, power, and labor. Of course, Novak might simply refrain from criticism because of his desire to emphasize the positive in a culture where the family is "out of favor" among the influential well-off and intellectual classes. I do not, however, accept this interpretation. I say this because, for one thing, the family is not "out of favor." More importantly, Novak's argument depends on the idea of the family as unambiguously a wonderful and moral institution. Novak is not merely saying that the family is currently the seat of moral reality given the harshness of capitalism; he is saying that capitalism is a fine thing if only it is balanced by the moral wonder of families.

Take, for instance, Novak's defense of the family for providing the "economic and educational disciplines" crucial for the survival of members of the working class. What working class people need to learn, by his account, is that "they have to be docile, agreeable, and efficient."¹⁰² To Novak, this is just the way of the world, rather than a feature of our occupational landscape that should be changed. His idea of a what is to be done

¹⁰²"The Family Out of Favor," p. 44.

is simply "a politics aimed at strengthening families," and nothing else.¹⁰³

To sum up, Novak, like Gilder, assumes that a concord exists in the universe at a high enough level to make all the discord that exists no more than potential tools for the learning of moral lessons. According to both we can tap this potential -- learn the right lessons -- only by means of the disciplines of family. They each have something to say about survival in a privatized and highly unequal society, but they fail to acknowledge just how sad this news is. To take their approach is to universalize, and thus depoliticize, present day economic and familial reality.

The Family, Concordance, and Normalization

The several perspectives on the modern family I have examined are by no means the same. The positions of Engels and of Barrett and McIntosh are not cruel in their immediate implications, as are the views of Gilder, Novak and Shorter. Gilder and Novak do not think of liberation as autonomy from forces of social determination, as do Shorter and Engels. On the other hand, all these views have something in common; they all postulate the possibility of, the conceivability of, or the reality of,

¹⁰³"The Family Out of Favor," p. 44.

a social world which is not fundamentally bound up with unjustified constraint and loss. This makes their views complicit with forces of normalization.

Shorter's way of contributing to normalization is the most indirect. He simply takes for granted the idea that choice can be freely exercised in the absence of tangible obstacles such as legal prohibitions, community tradition which is enforced by obvious public sanctions, and direct methods of community observation. Thus he overlooks, even denies, the ways choice is constructed, directed and effected by various forms of assistance and advice, by symbols and images of success, and by the indirect sanctions of images and realities of failure, abnormality, and illness. In addition, his view not only covers up the ill effects of the modern family, but also denies to people any leverage with which to criticize these effects, should they discover them. After all, how can one criticize that which is the product of free agency?

To Engels, free agency is more of a collective matter, and is a potential of the future rather than a reality of the present. This idea allows for the acknowledgement of, and a struggle against, the harm done by today's family, so it is in important ways less cruel than Shorter's view. On the other hand, any vision of the complete absence of coercion has the potential to cover up the ways social

forms necessarily force a shape upon people. While Shorter's view denies the possibility of a politics of the self, Engels looks forward to the disappearance of politics altogether. This first of all portends ill for the status of difference once victory is declared, as it is all too easy to justify hammering people into shape to achieve the expected consensus. Its second of all politicizes people's psychological state in the present, and, given the dichotomy it offers between ideological and liberated consciousness, this easily has the result of thematizing "political correctness." People targeted for the correction of their "false consciousness" have no theoretical resource with which to defend themselves.¹⁰⁴

Gilder and Novak, in contrast to both Engels and Shorter, do not include the achievement of radical free agency in their vision of the good life. Instead people are seen as forming commitments and making sacrifices within a determining context of shared beliefs and aspirations. This does not, however, mean a repudiation of concordance, as the determining context of the good society is idealized by postulating its harmony with moral rectitude and enduring human nature. Nor does it mean that they fully repudiate the idea of humans as

¹⁰⁴See Mary E. Hawkesworth's excellent discussion of the politics of "consciousness raising." "Re/Vision: Feminist Theory Confronts the Polis," pp. 174-176.

independent centers of choice and as autonomous creators of value. Novak is less explicit on this issue than Gilder, but both assume such independence in their reading of today's ills. More specifically, they blame our problems on the attitudes of the well-off and the government policies they lead to.¹⁰⁵ Neither thinker allows for the possibility that the attitudes he deplores (e.g., hedonism, a decline of the work ethic, and an aversion to commitment) are linked to the institutions he celebrates (in Gilder's case large scale markets, the private family, and hierarchical work life).

Of course attitudes are not entirely determined and it is fair to criticize them, but the focus on willful wrongheadedness allows both Gilder and Novak to pretend that all can be made well within the confines of corporate capitalism.¹⁰⁶ To them the costs and contradictions imposed by the latter are just the costs of life in general, and they can be put to good moral use by capitalism, the family, and the morally formed self which they situate. Thus, while Gilder and Novak give credit to

¹⁰⁵Gilder is upset about the "masochistic intelligentsia" and "the defecting upper class", the latter being the leading architects of "the war against wealth." See Wealth and Poverty, p. 8 and p. 125.

¹⁰⁶Gilder remarks at one point that most American monopoly is caused by government policy. Wealth and Poverty, p. 286.

people's common sense appreciation of family as morally fundamental, their analyses cruelly condemn people to forever rely on family to get them through a brutal class system. This simply fails to work for many and for others (especially women) comes at a terrible cost in isolation, abuse, powerlessness, and unhappiness. In the meantime, Gilder and Novak each thematize moral fitness, thus abetting pressures on people adjust themselves internally for the sake of the success of the order. We should all, by Gilder's view, purge ourselves of hopes for security and selfish visions of equality. For the poor and marginal members of society this means fending off the insidious liberal demon which promises rights and entitlements.

To sum up, the threat of normalization stems from a dream of overcoming ambiguity. Milan Kundera, speaking of totalitarianism, has said,

The evil is already present in the beautiful, hell is already contained in the dream of paradise and if we wish to understand the essence of hell we must examine the essence of the paradise from which it originated.¹⁰⁷

The paradise we tend to seek is a concord outside of the human condition. Simone De Beauvoir is wrong when, in the midst of a rather incisive critique of socialism, she says

¹⁰⁷Milan Kundera, The Book of Laughter and Forgetting (New York: Penguin, 1981), p. 234.

that socialism at least recognizes that "we are not an animal species."¹⁰⁸ The point is rather that we are an animal species, and we should affirm this and the ambiguity that it entails.

¹⁰⁸De Beauvoir, The Second Sex (New York: Bantam Books, 1952), p. 47.

CHAPTER 5

AMBIGUITY AND MULTIPLICITY: A MINIMALIST DEFENSE OF FAMILY

I don't want to suggest for a minute that today's discourse is unified in a monotonous endorsement of concordance. I have already indicated that different theories postulate discordance at different levels, and, while concordance always seems to surface when it comes to the important issue of the self, the differences between theories are nonetheless important.

Moreover, today's discourse includes more than one perspective on the modern family which rejects the possibility of a harmonious self. One of these is of course the genealogical tradition represented by Foucault and Donzelot. Given the way these thinkers have indicted "psy" techniques for their role in processes of normalization, it is perhaps suprising that the psychoanalytic school of thought also has as its basis the idea of the self as a fundamentally discordant entity. This tradition take its clue from a great thinker of discordance, Sigmund Freud, and like him it has been very

successful at combining both critique and celebration in its analysis.

The differences between Freud and Foucault are, along with the various differences and oppositions operative within the psychoanalytic tradition, important here for two reasons. First, they point to the fact that there is plenty of room for disagreement once an approach of discordance is adopted. Second, they are of great relevance when it comes to the question of what politics of child-rearing and personal life flows from the point of view of discordance. This question is the focus in this final chapter. I argue that an approach to this question based on Freud can yield insight but is rooted in too fixed a view of the dilemmas of discordance and is likely to unduly prioritize the issue of "personality." This leads to a defense of family (and a critique of family) which is too centered on domestic dynamics. The fact of modern culture's focus on the all-importance of family is reinforced rather than called into question, and the apparently extra-familial spheres of political culture, political history, occupational structure and the like tend to be treated as secondary. Moreover, when the latter are given their proper due as factors in the shaping of our dilemmas and the viability of various changes that might be made, the psychological evidence

appears inconclusive with regard to the question of what is to be done.

As an alternative, I offer what I call a "minimalist" defense of family, where "family" signifies not so much a particular form of child care but instead simply a relation of some distance to the state and to the public realm where everything is equally everyone's business. The ideal of family, by this view, should make reference only to a fairly skeletal view of what counts as the neglect of children and of what counts as care necessary to the development of humans as ethical selves. I should emphasize that the point here is not that the defense of the family should be minimalist in its vigor, only that it should be so in the vision of "family" that is defended. This means that we should avoid detailing what constitutes a family and instead provide vastly increased across the board support for all the individuals who care for and protect children. People need to have the power to create a variety of sorts of family in accordance with their own judgments about their personal needs and their social situation. We need perhaps to be a little less "pro-family," as this phrase is usually intended, and instead to make our societies more pro-parent, pro-guardian, pro-household and pro-children. This has the promise of making families less a policed and normalizing reality

and more of an enabling and empowering one. This entails changes at both the "micro" level of the ways people live together and raise children and the macro level of economic policy and economic structure. I conclude this chapter with a discussion of these changes and the role that the state can (ands perhaps cannot) play in bringing them about.

The Family and the Economics of Instinct

Christopher Lasch is one of today's well known followers of Freud.¹ As I have already noted, his critique centers on the way the modern family rationalizes that to which it is a response --"capitalism's devastation of all forms of collective life." Lasch is concerned to support the reversal of this devastation in the form of a socialist polity "in which collective needs rather than private profit determine both the form and content of production," and according to him the modern family now helps to

¹Lasch sees himself as reasserting the more "radical" insights of Freud, a task made necessary by the "social science cant" which he says dominates the left and right and which understands humans as "oversocialized" pure creatures of culture and yet as capable, in potential, of radical freedom, entirely in control of themselves and their destiny. This is, of course, the "cant" of concordance, and it is indeed a problem. See Haven, pp. 22-24, p. 80, and pp. 132-133. Lasch's other major works are The Minimal Self: Psychic Survival in Troubled Times (New York: W.W.Norton, 1984) and The Culture of Narcissism: American Life in an Age of Diminishing Expectations, (New York: W.W. Norton, 1979).

prevent this.² On the other hand, Lasch is a staunch defender of the private family, as he argues that social democracy depends on the construction of a certain sort of principled self which only it can produce. Unfortunately this wonderful thesis of ambiguity is marred by the fact that Lasch, thanks in part to the version of Freudian psychology he endorses and in part to problems inherent in a psychoanalytic approach, privileges a particular form of family as the family without adequate justification and so fails to adequately challenge today's processes of normalization. Lasch ends up advising us more or less to simply reverse a supposed takeover of the family by the outside forces engendered by capitalism. To attempt this is simply to repeat society's privileging of family and so to repeat that which rationalizes the capitalist institutions Lasch opposes.

Socialization -- "The only function of the family that matters"-- means for Lasch the positive acquisition of identity.³ It involves the transformation of biologically given sex into socially constructed gendered subjectivity. Lasch asserts that this process, if done at its best, creates humans as ethical beings who create and critique

²Haven, p. xxi.

³Haven, p. 130. See Barrett and McIntosh's discussion of the concept of "socialization," The Anti-social Family, pp. 105-110.

authority according to principle. For Lasch, as for Freud, this a messy and costly struggle whereby civilization is imposed on the multiplicity of the self and its infinite and contradictory erotic and aggressive demands.⁴ Life necessarily involves profound loss, separation, dependence and guilt.

Children, says Lasch, will handle their struggle with these dilemmas for the best if they grow up in an "orderly, predictable, loving," and emotionally intense relationship between themselves and their parents.⁵ The combination of love and authority in the same powerful, and attractive, figures allows the child to achieve "identification," which means the mastery of inner rage and fear of authority.⁶ Such identification is said by Lasch to be necessary if children are to develop past shame (the fear of ridicule) to guilt (the fear of parental disapproval and self-disapproval). Although he does not put it this way, Lasch's idea of successful socialization involves a kind of acceptance of discordance. "Mature freedom," he says, involves a

⁴In Freud's words, "there are difficulties attaching to the nature of civilization which will not yield to any attempt at reform." Civilization and Its Discontents, trans. by James Strachey (W. W. Norton, 1961), p. 70. See also pp. 51-60 on the necessity of instinctual renunciation.

⁵Haven, p. 164.

⁶Haven, p. 123.

recognition of "man's contradictory place in the natural order of things."⁷

Lasch's concern is that socialization of this sort is today being undermined and displaced by another sort, one that supports the powers that be by making principled opposition rare. The problem, he says, is the type of typical personality being created: people have weak egos, are opposed to authority per se, are afraid of being asked to live up to any expectations, and are dominated by a concern with the present and with mere survival.⁸ People are dominated, in other words, by society's standard of the "realistic." Put in terms of psychological development, Lasch's thesis is that children fail to overcome an original dependence on the mother, and this derails the identification process needed to properly create the superego. The children of our "shame culture" are deeply dependent, resentful, and resigned -- in a word, "Narcissistic."⁹

⁷The Minimal Self, p. 257.

⁸See The Minimal Self, especially pp. 60-99.

⁹The home, says Lasch, has, like the rest of society, has been reduced "to a state of warfare" (or rather a precarious truce), because the father is afraid of "the dangers of close personal intercourse . . . , rationalizing passivity in the form of an ideology of non-binding commitments." The then dominant mother imposes "her madness on everybody else" (Haven, p. 157).

This Narcissistic (or "minimalist") self is, says Lasch, preoccupied with personality and its harmony. This concern "originates in the ego's need to assert itself ...in order to counter the forces that seem bent on its annihilation."¹⁰ Another way one might put this, of course, is that the modern self is overly bent on the pursuit of concord. And indeed Lasch considers the transformation and distortion of Freud's ideas, so as "to redefine psychoanalysis as a theory of behavior," to be a result of this concern with harmony.¹¹

The theory of interpersonal relations bases itself on the premise that personality constitutes not a battleground (Freud's more accurate perception) but an integrated, harmonious whole.¹²

The "forces" that, according to Lasch, make the self feel deeply threatened seem to be a combination of events and interventions. The events he speaks of are totalitarianism, nuclear weapons and death camps; these have he says promoted despair about the meaning of individual political action and commitment. Thanks mainly to Donzelot, we already know something about the interventions he is concerned with. In Lasch's language, managerial and professional classes have "invaded" the

¹⁰Haven, p. 66.

¹¹Haven, p. 65.

¹²Haven, p. 66.

family in support of the interests of capitalism. A kind of dual movement by specialists ("doctors, psychiatrists, child guidance experts, officers of juvenile courts") and by social science (anthropology, sociology and psychology) has simultaneously upheld the importance of the family and attacked it for its incompetence, destroying the confidence of parents and facilitating the takeover of family functions by the school, the peer group and these same professionals. While the family is purported to be different from the outside world of instrumental interaction, it is not, says Lasch, thus setting up a cycle of personal failures, outside advice and intervention, and continued acquiescence to the desirability or inevitability of those larger structures. The contemporary family fails to uphold "values" or work on "principles opposed to the ones that prevail elsewhere."¹³

Ultimately, however, Lasch attributes the modern pursuit of harmony to capitalism's imposition of a particular version of the public/private split, a version which is based on the separation of home from work and of work from leisure. The rise of mechanized and market-structured modes of work has, of course, been an integral element in the history of this separation, and Lasch (following Marx)

¹³Haven, p.143.

believes that these forms of work life lead to people's feelings of powerlessness and internal division.¹⁴ Lasch moreover considers the removal of work from the home to be a psychological calamity in itself.

When protection, work, and instruction in work have all been removed from the home, the child no longer identifies with his parents or internalizes their authority in the same way as before, if indeed he internalizes their authority at all.¹⁵

This calamity is according to Lasch manifested in the trend toward the transitory coupling of adults and the standoffishness of youth. Lasch believes that these developments, far from signifying freedom (Shorter's view), indicate a failure of today's family, along with other social institutions, to enable people to come to terms with separation and dependence. This is said by Lasch to spell a greater conformity, a more fragile sense of self, and more total control by the state.

It should be clear by now that Lasch's critique of contemporary perspectives on family is in many ways in keeping with what I have said thus far; indeed I commend him for emphasizing the inevitability of discord and imposition. His approach to the whole issue, especially his thoughts about what is needed, are, however, flawed in

¹⁴Haven, pp. 7-8.

¹⁵Haven, p. 130.

important respects. Some of these problems stem from the particular approach to psychology that he adopts, and some are more deeply rooted in the psychoanalytic stance to the question of discord. To put this another way, there are flaws in Lasch's approach to questions of personality, and there are problems inherent to any theory that focuses on personality.

Concordance as Narcissism

Lasch's concern with personality is plain to see. Whereas I have concerned myself with locating what I see as the problematic assumptions of concord implicit in various views, Lasch is concerned with the way some of these same views are expressive of different malformed personality types. There is first of all "the party of the superego" (neo-conservatives such as Gilder), who are criticized for falsely understanding freedom as the destructive and exciting unleashing of raw impulse. They are said to seek an escape from the dangers of freedom through the punitive imposition of a moral law.¹⁶ There is next "the party of the rational ego" (liberals such as Shorter) and "the party of Narcissus" (psychoanalytic feminists, pacifists, environmentalists, and democratic

¹⁶"It hankers for the restoration of punitive sanctions against disobedience, above all for the restoration of fear" (The Minimal Self, pp. 258-259).

socialists -- e.g., "advocates of a cultural revolution"), whom Lasch criticizes for rejecting dependence and denying the true "definition of selfhood as tension, division, conflict."¹⁷ These last two groups are said by Lasch to misunderstand freedom as the end of a guilty conscience, liberals in asserting the ability of the self to bring the social under its control, and radicals in denying the boundaries between self and world.

In contrast to these "pathological" points of view, Lasch defends the Aristotelian conception of practice as "purposeful activity" because it understands that humans are both connected to and apart from nature.¹⁸ Lasch first distinguishes this notion from the "instrumentalism" of liberals, which he points out forgets that we are natural beings.

Instrumentalism regards the relation of ends and means as purely external, whereas the older tradition, now almost forgotten, holds that the choice of the means appropriate to a given end has to

¹⁷The Minimal Self, p. 258

¹⁸See for example Lasch's critique of the modern valorization of instrumental reason (The Minimal Self, p. 247). The Minimal Self, p. 255. Lasch in some ways echoes other critiques of modernity based on the classical tradition. See Wilson Carey McWilliams, "On Equality as the Moral Foundation for Community," The Moral Foundations of the American Republic, Second Edition, Robert H. Horwitz, ed. (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1979), and Alasdair MacIntyre, After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory (University of Notre Dame Press, 1984). See also the discussion of the decline of the concept of a "calling" in Bellah, et. al., Habits of the Heart, pp. 65-71.

be considered as it contributes to internal goods as well..¹⁹

On the other hand Lasch says that this "older tradition" is also superior to the prevailing Narcissism of the radical left, which overly equates humans and nature. In contrast the internal goods which Aristotle speaks of are said by Lasch to be best conceived of, not as the realization of a true essence (as in fact Aristotle thought) or as the achievement of a communion with nature (as the radical left supposedly thinks), but as a technique of social construction, as the development of proper forms of "compensatory gratification."²⁰

The only way out of the impasse of narcissism is the creation of cultural objects, "transitional objects," that simultaneously restore a sense of connection with mothers and with mother nature and assert our mastery over nature, without denying our dependence on mothers or nature.²¹

What Lasch is doing here is restating Aristotle in terms of Freudian psychology. Thus, while Lasch says that the creation of transitional objects requires the rescusitation of work and politics as realms of the development of excellence, he doesn't speak very much about his vision of work and politics. Instead he spends

¹⁹The Minimal Self, pp. 254-255.

²⁰The Minimal Self, p. 246.

²¹The Minimal Self, p. 246. On the human relationship to nature, see also The Minimal Self, p. 256.

his time discussing its purported psychological precondition: the coming to terms with the ambiguous human relation to mothers and "mother nature."

I suppose that Lasch considers "mother" and "mother nature" to be universal categories that apply with equal force to the existential psychological situation of both men and women. What he asserts, however, is that a being called "man" must simultaneously master "mother" nature and acknowledge his dependence on both "her" and actual mothers if "he" is to achieve mature freedom. This seems to me to amount to the claim, however obliquely made, that a mature freedom depends on the maintenance of the categories of man as culture and as human being and woman as nature and as both more and less than human. If women are so identified, is not the call to assert mastery over nature also a call for men to assert mastery over women, who represent mothers and nature? In fact the association of women with nature constitutes a central prop by which women have, in modern times at least, been excluded from public life and been forced to speak or establish some kind of identity for themselves largely within terms made by men.²²

²²See Sherry B. Ortner, "Is Female to Male as Nature is to Culture?," Women, Culture and Society, pp. 67-87. Ortner makes the case that the distinction of male/culture versus female/nature has served cross-culturally and universally to ground the oppression of women. This may be the case, but, given the difficulty of what constitutes oppression in different cultures, and given the unique content

Perhaps a distinction between women and men along the lines of nature and culture could, within a different system of power, operate in a new way, with different effects less prejudicial to women, or perhaps it could be overcome -- left behind -- as changes in attitudes to nature mesh with changes in conceptions of selves and gender. Lasch, however, does not make the case for the former or the latter. Nor does he acknowledge that the distinction is linked in any way to the problems faced by women.

In fact Lasch shows a considerable lack of sensitivity to gender issues. This is indicated by the way he speaks simply of socialization when he is in fact referring to the boy's internalization of the father's authority. He seems to see the problem of mature freedom in terms of the problems male children face in dealing with dependence on mothers, just as he in effect identifies the supposed decline of the right kind of socialization with the decline of the father's, rather than the parent's, authority.²³ Additionally, Lasch spends little time

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imputed by the enlightenment to "nature," to "culture," and to the distinction between them, I limit myself here to the claim that the assimilation of "women" to nature has come to be more prejudicial to women as the enlightenment idea of humans as subjects who center the world and administer nature has become dominant.

²³Haven, p. 162. While Lasch says "The justice of women's demand for equality remains too obvious to ignore" (Haven, p. xvi), he follows Freud in talking mostly about the psychic battles of little boys, rather than little girls, and he argues that the psychic development girls must go

considering the question of what else families could be besides patriarchal or invaded, and this despite the considerable literature on the subject generated by an alternative Freudian school of thought: psychoanalytic feminism.²⁴ He for example says almost nothing about this school's central proposition, which is the idea that the near-universal reliance on women for child care reproduces what Lasch would call instrumentalist men and Narcissistic women. One might especially expect him to deal directly with Nancy Chodorow's argument, as she connects more equal child-rearing arrangements with the achievement of the very goal endorsed by Lasch -- that both men and women strike a balance between, and comes to terms with,

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through as they encounter their bodies and become women necessarily makes them more passive than men (Haven, pp. 79-80).

²⁴Important examples of this literature include Nancy Chodorow, "Family Structure and Feminine Personality," Woman, Culture and Society, Michelle Zimbalist Rosaldo and Louise Lamphere, eds. (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1974); Nancy Chodorow, The Reproduction of Mothering: Psychoanalysis and the Sociology of Gender (University of California Press, 1978); Dorothy Dinnerstein, The Mermaid and the Minotaur: Sexual Arrangements and Human Malaise (New York: Harper and Row, 1976); Stephanie Engel, "Femininity as Tragedy," Socialist Review, no. 53, 1980. pp. 77-104; and Jessica Benjamin, "Authority and the Family Revisited: Or, A World Without Fathers," New German Critique, no. 13 (Autumn, 1978), pp. 35-37.

dependence and separation.²⁵ Lasch, however, ignores this and proceeds to accuse her of rejecting rationality and selfhood altogether.²⁶

Lasch's insensitivity on this score is in a way surprising, given that, like Freud, he rejects the idea that nurturance and purposive rationality are respectively "male" and "female" characteristics. Instead he considers these options to be equally open to men and women, even as he believes that both sexes are also equally given to the errors of pursuing either self-sufficiency or mutuality and relatedness, in responses to life's dilemmas.²⁷ But Lasch's failure to consider alternative gender arrangements makes more sense if we take his remarks on "mother" and "mother nature" to mean that he favors female-centered child-rearing arrangements as necessary to achieve proper socialization (selfhood). This interpretation is reinforced by Lasch's persistent use of

²⁵"Family Structure and Feminine Personality," Women, Culture, and Society, ed. by Michelle Zimbalist Rosaldo and Louise Lamphere (Stanford University Press, 1974).

²⁶Lasch criticizes the entire "party of Narcissus" for rejecting purposeful activity entirely, along with its instrumental version. The Minimal Self, p. 244, p. 247, and p. 253. For a sympathetic reading of Lasch on this point, see Kent M. Brudney, "Christopher Lasch and the Withering of the American Adam," Political Theory, 15, 1 (February, 1987), p. 134.

²⁷The Minimal Self, p. 245.

the word "decline" when speaking of the family.²⁸ Because of this he has been accused of supporting "patriarchy."²⁹ Whether this is fair or not depends on what one means by the term. Lasch is not opposed (at least explicitly) to economic equality for women. He instead opposes the equalization of child care "under existing economic conditions" because, by his reasoning, it would only result in a more politically vulnerable personality and worse care for the young.³⁰ He sees this position not as a defense of "patriarchy" but merely as the concern that the authority of the mother will follow the example of the authority of the father and gradually disappear, leaving

²⁸Haven, p. 20. There is a contradiction here, as Lasch considers the family proper to be marked by both emotional intensity and the presence of work in the home, but historically the former became the norm as the latter declined. By Lasch's criteria, then, we could never have had an institution of family that internalized authority very well, so it is not clear how it could have declined. It is of course not contradictory to endorse an "ideal" of socialization and then argue that we approximate it less than we used to, but the facts do not bear this thesis out, at least not enough to merit Lasch's privileging of the family, which he says has been "invaded." This metaphor falsely suggests that the family of old was more voluntary, more autonomous vis-a-vis power relations and the order, and more truly private. See Barrett and McIntosh, The Anti-social Family, p. 111 and p. 115.

²⁹See for example Barrett and McIntosh, The Anti-social Family, p. 121.

³⁰Haven, p. xvi.

nothing between the individual and the impersonal interests of society.³¹

On the other hand, Lasch's model of successful socialization commits him to a defense of a breadwinner and homemaker/nurturer division of family responsibility. He and psychoanalytic feminists agree that these arrangements tend to create strong ego-boundaries and a weak sense of sexual identification in men, but he strongly suggests a connection between these personality characteristics and the creation of humans capable of principled resistance to authority, while they criticize them instead as both rendering men "psychologically defensive and insecure," and guaranteeing male "sociocultural superiority."³² Lasch's argument can, then, be said to be "patriarchal" in a certain sense, in that he seems to assume a connection between the achievement of mature freedom and the establishment of "traditional" (modern) "male" and "female" personalities.³³

³¹Haven, pp. 115-116. To Lasch those who attack the (by now largely egalitarian) family as authoritarian or patriarchal miss the point and contribute to a process of crisis and decay by undermining the credibility of the "parent's" authority. The point they supposedly miss is the problem of the passive and unprincipled personality.

³²Chodorow, "Family Structure and Feminine Personality," p. 66.

³³Lasch's critique of Narcissism can, in other words, be looked at as a critique of a "feminization" of personality. It is because of this that Stephanie Engel and Barrett and McIntosh say that Lasch arrives "at a

Is the recovery of paternal authority necessary if we are to achieve a recognition of discord? Were Hegel and Aristotle right about the need for a strict division of roles, even if the cost is much higher than either of them thought? I suppose that this is possible, but the price to be paid is very high, especially for women, and I am not at all convinced. In fact, Chodorow's proposition, that the homemaker/breadwinner division in modern conditions perpetuates a disempowering pursuit of concord, seems much more plausible to me.

It is hard to squarely confront Lasch on this issue because his only overt claim regarding gender equality is that a tradeoff between equality for women and mature freedom exists now, "under current economic conditions." Even on this count, however, Lasch is unconvincing. If families are anywhere near as invaded by outside forces and principles as he says they are, it is hard to see how there is much to lose from women joining the work force (as they already have). In fact I am inclined to agree with Suzanne H. Woolsey and Mary Howell that children with two parent-caretakers are benefited if both of those

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stance that systematically devalues women's experience as well as feelings of attachment, mutuality, identification and relatedness." See Barrett and McIntosh, The Anti-social Family, p. 124, and see Stephanie Engel, "Femininity as Tragedy," p. 88.

caretakers work (at jobs that provide satisfaction and self-esteem).³⁴

Such good jobs are of course a rarity, and the compatibility of modern occupational structures and the creation of "empowered" or "mature" personalities is very much open to question. This is however no reason to bemoan the "decline" of the family or the entry of women into the work force. On the other hand it is also not enough (although still important) to call for more equalized child care, if industrial society means that bad, neglectful, or politically stifling forms of upbringing will prevail regardless of how equally their burdens and joys are shared. These considerations should lead us also to ask questions of, for example, political economy, and in general ask after the implications of modernity for children. This is where some of the limits inherent to a psychoanalytic approach become apparent.

Problems with the Psychoanalytic Approach

Neither Freud nor his followers engage in enough criticism of the enlightenment understanding of nature as fundamentally other to the subject. Rather they repeat

³⁴See Woolsey, "Pied-Piper Politics and the Child-Care Debate," Daedalus 106, no. 2 (Spring, 1977): pp. 141-142; and Howell, "Employed Mothers and Their Families," Pediatrics, 52, no. 2 and no. 3 (August and September, 1973). See also Ourselves and Our Children, p. 195.

its terms by thinking of nature as both the limit and means to the satisfaction of individual instincts. Thus we are told that there is a single and permanent dilemma built into the human condition. The question becomes one of how to create the "personality" that will best mediate between the never directly seen "instincts" and the culture and "sociability" that are valued only for the instinctual satisfaction which we could not have without them. The search for the social (in Lasch's terms, the ideal of Narcissus) is turned into a universal and inevitable psychological feature -- it is said to be Eros itself.

In Lasch's case the effect of this is to undermine his own emphasis on the importance of political action as a means to reorganize the world of work. First, his stress on the central importance of the "right" family life acts to reinforce both the depoliticizing idea that a good family life is everything and the disempowering sense people have that they don't measure up. This could pave the way for the increased "management" of families. Second, Lasch questions the assumption of the benign character of the social by ruling out entirely the idea that social and political life are somehow natural to humans. He reduces ideals to "substitute gratifications." Given this approach, he cannot translate his concern that

we become beings with principles into a statement of what these principles should be. Virtue is seen as an adaption, not as intrinsic excellence. Another way of putting this is that Aristotle does not translate well into the language of an economics of instinct. A more promising approach from the point of view of enabling political action would be to argue that social and political life are of intrinsic worth but at a cost. In other words, Aristotle should instead be rewritten from a point of view of discordance.

As I have already said, Lasch's focus on the category of "personality" as a means of responding to a relatively fixed human condition also leads him to unnecessarily pessimistic conclusions about the compatibility between equality for women and men and the worthwhile transformation of the realms of politics and work. This makes his work vulnerable to appropriation by various conservative political forces which he opposes. On this score psychoanalytic feminism presents an preferable alternative, as it points out that an increase in the father's authority is not a prerequisite to the development of politically empowered personalities. On the other hand, by virtue of its similar reliance on instinctual theory, psychoanalytic feminism tends to follow Lasch in reifying the dream of a home as a feature

of every human, not an assumption that can be more or less problematized within different sets of social and discursive practices. The focus is thus still on the proper resolution of conflicts within the self, instead of on, say, the way "homesickness" is nourished and the resolution of conflicts is emphasized (by, among other things, psychoanalysis).³⁵

One way to get at the problems with a psychoanalytic perspective is to compare it to a genealogical one. Both Donzelot and Lasch find a positive connection between the weakening of family ties and new forms of social management, but Donzelot's approach points not toward "personality" but toward structures, structures which converge to locate people in private struggles managed by an assortment of interventions at various levels. Donzelot calls on us to challenge disciplinary practices based on ideas of family, not to restore (or for that matter abolish) the idea of family.³⁶

³⁵Psychoanalytic feminism has made for some powerful accounts (and critique) of the creation of gendered subjectivity. See for example Carol Gilligan, In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women's Development (Harvard University Press, 1982). I have focused on Lasch rather than psychoanalytic feminism in my critique for reasons of space and because his views are farther from mine. It is therefore more important to me to distinguish between his perspective and my own. For a good general discussion of psychoanalytic feminism see Elshaint, Public Man, Private Woman, pp. 285-97.

³⁶Barrett and McIntosh criticize Donzelot and Lasch alike for basing their criticism of the contemporary family on an idealization of an "invaded" patriarchal family. While Donzelot would do better if did not so blithely

A genealogical perspective does not preclude one from following Lasch in his claim that humans will always be tempted by some sort of ideal of complete harmony, and Donzelot and Lasch clearly agree that the current fact of this temptation is put to controlling political use, but this is not to say that the situation is fixed, either in terms of the harmony sought or the dangers involved. The contemporary situation is the result of the combined effect of many "discursive practices;" it results, in other words, from the circulation and the absence of many ideals, the fact of many practices, and the reality of many constraints and liberties.

The fact that Lasch follows psychoanalysis in seeing power as a negative law-like force over against desire means that he cannot countenance the possibility that we live within a situation (a series of discursive practices) that give the dilemma-bound nature of human existence a particular shape.³⁷ Perhaps, for example, it is only by
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refer to the family of the "ancien regime" as if it was not a social construction, it is a mistake to equate him with Lasch on this score. Donzelot's critique of contemporary times can, because of his concern to reveal the family as a construction, be seen to refer as an alternative not so much to the patriarchal family of old as to a possible future in which "family," as a concept that organizes households, is more contested and more varied in its formulations than today.

³⁷Foucault points out that psychoanalysis follows the psychiatry that preceded it and Western political thought in general in that it understands power in a "juridico-discursive" way, as that which says "no." Psychoanalysis, says Foucault, only changed the repressive hypothesis by putting forward a new understanding of desire, as that

virtue of a particular way of thinking and speaking that it appears as if the acceptance of freedom and the losses it entails depends on the fixing of "woman" as the mother whom "man" must both master and depend on. And perhaps this way of thinking and speaking is already receding behind us.

In fact there are many plausible notions of "maturity" and "mature freedom," none of which is uncontestably superior or politically neutral. For this reason it is wise to proceed with caution when counseling reform in accordance with any detailed model of the "best" socialization. Instead reforms should be based on rather minimal ideas about what constitutes good upbringing and neglect, and should aim for the most part simply to create space for people to have more say in their domestic arrangements than they do now.

The Import of Alternative Modes of Childrearing

What, then, are the "minimal" ideas about good upbringing which I endorse? Before answering this directly, I want to further make the case that the theory

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which is only by virtue of, rather than despite, the negative work of power. See The History of Sexuality, pp. 81-91 and pp. 100-101.

and evidence as to what constitutes good upbringing points in certain directions but is nonetheless inconclusive and ambiguous on several counts. Rather than survey the vast and varied literature that pertains to this subject, I limit myself to a review of some of the various and opposing arguments about more and less "collective" modes of child rearing and their effects on personality.

I should first say a few words about the terms I use in this chapter, as there are of course a host of possible living and child rearing arrangements. Following the authors of Ourselves and our Children, I use "cooperative family living" to refer to a group of families who agree to share some activities and some living space but retain their separate identities.³⁸ There is also "communal family living" where a group of families and individuals choose to tie themselves more closely to each other by sharing a house or perhaps a piece of land. At the end of the continuum is "communal society." Here I have in mind practices that make the community and its representatives stand in the relationship of the protector and caretaker for the children. In the Kibbutzim of Israel and the early Oneida community of New York state this is accomplished first by having children live in a children's house of some sort and visit (perhaps everyday) with their

³⁸pp. 179-185.

biological parents, and second by organizing the daily life of adults such that biological or familial connections with others are not all that relevant. This means some kind of relatively communal form of householding, where work, play and the two together take place within the public space of the whole group.

Since the issue at hand is the effects of child rearing on personality, I focus here on the question of the differences between communal society and the private nuclear family (partly because these two forms have been the object of a great deal of study). Lasch of course is part of this debate, as his critique of the "decline of parental authority" commits him to an opposition to collective child rearing, which he says is already with us to a degree. His psychological theory is, however, like many others in that it fails to settle the issue, and in the meantime poses some threats of its own.

I begin with the argument of Barrett and McIntosh who, in opposition to Lasch, call for "increased social responsibility" in the raising of children. Given that they speak favorably of the kibbutzim and the Oneida community, and since they argue that these communitities teach us that "the strengthening of community requires the weakening of family ties," I assume that they consider communal society to be the ideal form of such social

responsibility.³⁹ They stop short, however, of calling explicitly for industrialized countries to adopt such arrangements. This is perhaps done so as to avoid the difficult question of whether or not the lessons apparently taught by some small and self-selected agricultural communities need to be reconsidered in the light of very different conditions. It also might be because their critique of the contemporary family does not (despite their claims) add up to an argument against the private family per se.

For example, one of the points they (Barrett and McIntosh) make is that child-rearing in the family tends to produce "a highly individualistic personality structure."⁴⁰ The details of their argument, however, only make the claim that such a personality is the typical product of "an enclosed family, with one parent [the mother] mainly responsible for the children."⁴¹ Then, after they go on to describe this personality -- one marked by "a lack of concern for group support and approval or group interests" -- they compare it not to the typical personality of children raised in other sorts of families but instead to that of the typical collectively

³⁹The Anti-social Family, p. 53.

⁴⁰The Anti-social Family, p. 51.

⁴¹The Anti-social Family, p. 51.

reared child, who is said to have a greater dependence on the peer group and more security of self.⁴² This leaves important questions unanswered, and it makes it all the easier for them to jump to their conclusion -- that the family is "anti-social" and should be transcended.

Barrett and McIntosh in other words fail to make a thorough or convincing case that we ought to move to more collective forms of child care. This does not, of course, mean that we ought not to do so, and Barrett and McIntosh are on firmer ground when they argue that the typical collectively reared child is different, rather than inadequate, as compared to the typical family raised child. This, at any rate, is a reasonable conclusion to draw from Bruno Bettelheim's assessment of child-rearing on the kibbutz. Using Erik Erikson's model of psychic development, Bettelheim says that that growing up on the kibbutz creates an easing of feelings of shame and doubt, as well as an absence of adolescent crisis.⁴³ He also says that on the other hand the kibbutz personality has a tendency to be "flat," to lack imagination.⁴⁴ It does not

⁴²Chodorow makes a similar move when she compares collective child-rearing to exclusive mothering, but she more sensibly limits her to the claim that "exclusive single parenting is bad for mother and child alike." The Reproduction of Mothering, p. 217.

⁴³The Children of the Dream (Toronto, Ontario: Macmillan,, 1969), pp. 313-317.

⁴⁴The Children of the Dream, p. 172. See also Elshtain's discussion of Bettelheim's work, Public Man, Private Woman, pp. 294-296.

"deepen" as a result of having resolved crises successfully.⁴⁵ His overall evaluation is mixed. "In terms of Erikson's model, despair is avoided at some cost to personal identity, emotional intimacy, and individual achievement."⁴⁶

Such a "cost" is, of course, no small matter, as Bettelheim knows. But on the other hand one cannot conclude from his study that kibbutz-raised children are not in some ways ethical, caring selves. The evidence does nothing to impune Hauerwas' and Noddings' claim that ethical development depends on experiences of caring that children (and adults) have within ongoing and reciprocal relations with specific others, but it suggests that these others do not have to be parents or a single set of adult guardians. According to Bettelheim, "the kibbutz example suggests that the infant can achieve basic trust even if there is much less sameness and continuity of the outside provider than we assume is needed, so long as continuous providing is guaranteed."⁴⁷ Of course it is one thing to establish "basic trust" and another to establish "a reciprocal relationship of caring," but in the kibbutz it

⁴⁵The Children of the Dream, p. 315.

⁴⁶The Children of the Dream, p. 318.

⁴⁷The Children of the Dream, p. 66.

seems that the latter is established between the child on the one hand and the kibbutz, as mediated through peers, caretakers, and parents, on the other.⁴⁸

Adults can of course be uncaring, and communal or cooperative arrangements stand the risk of encouraging neglect or at least making it more convenient. The fact that there are plenty of "parents" available could mean that people only parent when they feel like it, and there may be times when nobody feels like it. This is more than an abstract concern, as many actual communes have been based on a philosophy which sees children as more or less equal to adults (able to choose parents) and which understands liberation as more or less the absence of obligation.⁴⁹ There is no shortage of psychological evidence when it comes to showing that children are confused and often disturbed as a result of being "freed" from the certainty of reliance on and obligation to specific others.⁵⁰

⁴⁸The Children of the Dream, pp. 70-71.

⁴⁹See Alice S. Rossi's critique of communal child-rearing, "A Biosocial Perspective on Parenting, Daedalus 106, no. 2 (Spring, 1977), pp. 13-16. See also R. Thamm, Beyond Marriage and the Nuclear Family (San Francisco, 1975), p. 124; R.M. Kanter, D. Jaffe, and D.K. Weisberg, "Coupling, Parenting, and the Presence of Others: Intimate Relationships in Communal Households," The Family Coordinator 24, no. 4 (1975): 433-52; and Firestone The Dialectic of Sex, p. 233.

⁵⁰Rossi, "A Biosocial Perspective on Parenting," p. 15.

This just goes to show how often people's attempts to live in a radically different way end up replicating much of the society they are explicitly rejecting. People who seek to "turn parenthood on and off and exchange children as well as sexual partners" are at one level rejecting the norms of "the family," but at another level they are embracing the liberal vision of the family as a voluntary grouping of like-minded people who get together for mutual satisfaction.⁵¹ Alice S. Rossi in fact argues that the "sexual script" and the "parenting script" of many communes is also found in the new family sociology; both, she says, seem "to be modeled on what has been a male pattern of relating to children, in which men turn their fathering on and off to suit themselves..."⁵²

Modes of Childrearing and Social Conformity

I conclude from this that we do not need to promote models of healthy psychological development so much as

⁵¹The kibbutz philosophy is quite unlike this in that it entails the acceptance of strong obligations to the group and a disapproval of extramarital sex (The Children of the Dream, p. 51). Kibbutzniks are ready and willing to make great sacrifices for the children (p. 131). Bettelheim observes, however, that the radical child-rearing arrangements of the kibbutz were an "afterthought." He surmises that "a society that had no interest in children" had to adjust to the fact of their existence in a way that allowed the adults to continue with the intense collective existence that was so important to them (pp. 17-18).

⁵²"A Biosocial Perspective on Parenting," p. 16.

critique bogus philosophies of liberation which make obligations to children optional, and tear down, weaken, or reform the societal structures that reflect and enforce these philosophies (such as the occupational and housing systems). One might counter perhaps that this cannot be done without transforming childcare so as to effect personality for the better. This brings back the question raised by Lasch: is there a relationship between modes of childrearing and the development of an ability either to acknowledge discord or engage in resistance to the demands of one's community?⁵³

In fact it is (fortunately) no easy thing to manufacture conformism, as the relationship of child-rearing practices to the development of a political culture is quite complex. On the other hand, the manufacture of

⁵³This issue is complicated by the fact that social discipline, while always impositional to some degree, is a necessary part of human life. People should be capable of resisting demands made by their community, but which ones? What is conformism to some are the minimal requirements of social order or morality to others. For my part, I don't want children growing up to take high levels of inequality for granted as the only "realistic" way to organize society, and I am upset that so many people insist that all pain is justified, that we live in an entirely moral universe, and that things can be made so right some day that we won't need to put up with politics any more. On a more affirmative note I want to people to be taught trust, kindness, cooperation and social responsibility. Of course not everyone will agree with my idea of what disciplines of the self are acceptable or worthwhile, nor can I demonstrate in some final way that I am right; thus I must live with the fact that even the goals I cherish the most are contestable.

nonconformism and political acuity is an equally daunting task. Consider again the case of the kibbutzim.

Bettelheim says that kibbutz children have little need or space to carry "on an internal, private monologue (or dialogue)" with themselves, and this he says combines with the lack of deep-seated differences among kibbutz members to produce an inability to conceive of themselves as different than they are. This in turn means a lack of political imagination.

[There is] less doubt about the validity of what one says. Hence the greater inner security, but also, later on, the only limited ability to accept any viewpoint as valid but one's own, which means a limited capacity to deal with hypothetical questions that put in question one's own values or way of life.⁵⁴

From the point of view of discordance, this is a very serious criticism of the kibbutz way of life, but it is not clear either that familial child-rearing does not carry similar risks in some contexts or that the results observed by Bettelheim flow from collective child-rearing per se.⁵⁵ On the first score, the contemporary U.S., with

⁵⁴The Children of the Dream, p. 173.

⁵⁵From a psychoanalytic feminist point of view, the kibbutz offers an experiment of very limited utility in assessing alternatives. The "meteplo" (those who oversee the care of the children in the children's houses) are all women. Rossi points out that "men are rarely involved in the care of the very young," in communes that prescribe the equal sharing of child care. "A Biosocial Perspective on Parenting," p. 25.

its private households, is certainly no bastion of non-conformism (even if the hero who bucks the crowd while affirming good old American values is a staple of popular culture). This is, as we have discussed, partly because of the effects of the family and its location in a class society. The family is heavily valorized as the locus both of harmony and fulfillment and of autonomy and personal effectiveness, but life is organized such that the family (like the rest of society) fails for the most part to provide these things. People often feel isolated and ineffectual, and these are not the conditions that breed principled political opposition or a repudiation of prevalent social norms.

A good deal has been said to this effect in the psychological literature. Many investigators for example agree with Urie Bronfenbrenner that "a warm, constricting mother-child relationship maximizes dependency and produces a child who is readily socialized to adult standards."⁵⁶ Jerome Kagan has spoken of the disempowering effects of class differences as mediated through the family. He says that the situation of the lower-class child is akin to that of the later-born child, just as the middle-class child shares features with the

⁵⁶Bronfenbrenner, with the assistance of John C. Condry, Jr., Two Worlds of Childhood: U.S. and U.S.S.R (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1970), p. 70.

first born. The children of the former group realize that they have little of what the culture and/or their family values, and then try to hide the resulting perceived inadequacy. Kagan says that in the lower-class child this leads to "a readiness to take risks, an easier disposition for aggression, and a tendency to assign responsibility for failure to external events."⁵⁷ The middle-class and the first born child, on the other hand, "is pushed to differentiate himself from the lower-class youngster once he recognizes his presence, probably during the early school years."⁵⁸ The result, says Kagan, is supposedly is less feeling of inadequacy but a more cautious and conformist outlook.

On the second score (the relationship of collective rearing and conformism), certain features of kibbutz upbringing help to develop self-confidence, and so point in the direction not of conformism but rather its opposite. For example, according to Bettelheim children who feel no good compared to their parents (typical of western middle-class families) experience more shame and internalize rules more thoroughly than the children of the kibbutz, who want only to measure up to their much closer

⁵⁷"The Child in the Family," Daedalus, 106, no. 2 (Spring, 1977): p. 50.

⁵⁸"The Child in the Family," p. 53.

peers.⁵⁹ The result, he says, is less self-doubt among kibbutzniks than among typical westerners. This may lead to an ability to resist which is not immediately evident, as those who do not like it on the kibbutz can leave and often do (this in itself is an act of courage and criticism which requires political imagination).⁶⁰ This also makes it unclear how best to interpret the tremendous unanimity on the kibbutz. Were the kibbutzim to constitute a whole society that somehow had to either accomodate, normalize and/or repress all its members, there might be a good deal more difference present. The kibbutz under those conditions might of course also fail, or fail to be in any fundamental sense true to the original kibbutz mission. It may be, then, that (as Bettelheim suggests) the lessson the kibbutz teaches is the desirability of multiple child rearing arrangements in any single society. "It is a fine system for some and not for others."⁶¹

In conclusion, while Lasch is on to something when he claims that collective child-rearing is already with us to a degree and has serious malignant conformist effects, the key issue is one of concordance and normalization, not of

⁵⁹The Children of the Dream, p. 311.

⁶⁰The Children of the Dream, p. 295.

⁶¹The Children of the Dream, p. 299.

socialization and personality.⁶² All sorts of "personality types," including the guilt-based "ethical" individual which Lasch defends, can potentially be put to service toward the ends of order.⁶³ Nor is Lasch very helpful when he posits parental authority as the only alternative to "the socialization of reproduction." There are in fact a host of possible forms of upbringing which are consistent with the formation of an ethical self and are uncertain or at least mixed in their political implications.⁶⁴ The most important question we need to

⁶²Along these lines Lasch's thesis could be construed not as the bemoaning of the ascendancy of the "feminine" personality but simply as the claim that a new and long overdue valorization of experiences and personality traits long thought of as "female" does somehow, in today's context, play into the hands of, or provide a foundation for, a new authoritarianism. Given the entirety of Lasch's work, I think this is a bit generous, but it certainly is an idea to be found in his work. See Kent M. Brudney, "Christopher Lasch and the Withering of the American Adam."

⁶³The current order was, for example, created by people with the typical "male" and "female" personalities engendered by the socialization process which Lasch compares favorably to that of today. At one level, it is important to accuse Lasch of sexism because he fails to ask by what system of the construction of gender we will produce the kind of individuals who will engage in the principled resistance he says that we need. At another level the important question is instead how to structure orders so that they have room for resistance.

⁶⁴Kagan goes so far as to say "...it may be impossible to state the principles underlying functional relations between specific parental practices and particular behavior in the child, except, perhaps, in the extreme, where consistently harsh physical abuse creates serious physical distress" ("The Child in the Family," p. 39).

ask about our rearing of children is not what personality we create but in what manner, and toward what ends, both adults and children are subjected to disciplines and assimilated to norms.

The difference between these alternatives is perhaps subtle, but nonetheless important. Normalization does of course involve the structuring of self, and so the making of "personality," but the point is to set one's sights at taming forces of normalization, not simply at redirecting socialization. We can perhaps go so far as to imagine an order with reduced requirements regarding personality, or for that matter one where personal style is less valorized. We ought not limit ourselves to a comparison of selves, as if we could pick the best one.

From a point of view concerned with concordance and normalization, the private family gets a mixed assessment. It provides many with much that is worthwhile and not easily replaced, but at a significant cost -- some costs being born by all and some especially born by women, by marginal economic groups, and by the institutionalized. My overall conclusion is that we should, while working within the framework of private households, aim to create space (provide support) for more people to have more say in the particulars of their domestic arrangements than they do now.

A "Minimal" Account of the Needs of Children

For all my criticism of psychological approaches to the politics of the family, I do endorse, as I have said, some "minimal" ideas about what constitutes "good" upbringing, and these are not without their political implications. I begin with the words of Jean Elshtain which I cited in chapter two, that people are (1) in need of living among others "in relations of concrete particularity," and (2) bound by "an imperative ...to discover, to understand and to create meaning."⁶⁵ What I read here is that humans come to be (and continue to live) in a process of identity formation (and reformation and adjustment). This involves the creation of meaning and requires the presence of specific others. Whatever the culture, children have crises, experience stress, and have to cope with anxiety. Their questions are "who am I?," "what am I?," "what is the world?," and, very early on, "what good am I? Distinctions of self and other, good and bad, desirable and undesirable, and alike and different, come very naturally and are reflectively applied by the child both to her or himself and to others."⁶⁶ Children compare themselves to others, make attachments to significant

⁶⁵Public Man, Private Woman, p. 318.

⁶⁶Kagan, "The Child in the Family," pp. 34-35.

others, perceive that certain attributes are desirable, judge themselves according to whether or not they have these attributes, and make an effort to fashion themselves so as to achieve a modicum of self-certainty and self-value. An essential part of this process of becoming a self is the development of a narrative about oneself; this story becomes partly constitutive of the self; "I" exist, for example, partly by virtue of the story which I know which tells me who "I" am. This story is filled with the meaningful and the symbolic. It involves judgments, and not just accounts; it is a memory of feelings as well as events.

Even according to this minimal psychology normalization is unavoidably a part of life; for to form a narrative-based vision of oneself is to some degree to impose a form on the self (or, one might better say, on the body) which accords somehow with particular visions of what a human should be. This inevitability of normalization is, put in these terms, nothing more than the inherent ambiguity of morality and the necessarily moral nature of human identity. The only options we have (if we even have them), concern how tightly drawn our identities are, how fully responsible we are to a model of a coherent self, how much slack is permitted by the larger order when it comes to identity formation and transformation, and, of

course, the contents of the moral judgments we internalize.

It follows from this that children at a minimum need a certain level of predictability and sense in the world -- inner and outer -- which they experience. One cannot come to be as a self in a particular world if what one does seems arbitrary in relation to what else happens. Perhaps more importantly, children need the means to develop and sustain some good judgments about themselves. This might mean roles to emulate, valued activity to perform, or the apparently non-contingent and deep-seated approval of significant others to merit. Modern society has made for an emphasis on the latter, as identification with roles is seen to unduly constrict autonomy, and as children, and young adults, have been deprived of participation in clearly productive or valued activity.⁶⁷

Even this minimal psychology suggests that the modern desire for autonomy has been partially self-defeating (perhaps I should say it has been "taken advantage of"), as the focus on love intensifies the private family space, makes caretakers vulnerable to normalizing advice and assistance, and in general helps to point people towards harmony and away from politics and conflict (see my arguments in chapter two).

⁶⁷Kagan, "The Child in the Family," pp. 40-43.

Adults also need roles to emulate, valued activity to perform, and ways to come to good judgments about themselves. In general, psychological science, while not determinative, gives support to those who claim that "one isolated parent at home with a child or children may not be the best way to structure child raising for the parent or for the child."⁶⁸ Instead the evidence suggests that community forms of sharing child care, widespread until the modern idealization of the isolated home and the introduction of divisive systems of social mobility, are good for children and adults. In such settings parents can get relief from the enormous responsibility of solo child care, and both parents and children can benefit from a diversity of role models, peers, and friends.⁶⁹ Rossi, in this context, refers favorably both to "growth centers" and to "multi-family households." Both could be aided by government and mostly privately controlled.

In the modern circumstance, growth centers in which young children spend part of each day may help to teach humility to the oldest child and self-confidence to the youngest.... Multi-family households, in which the sexual and parenting lines of the nuclear family remain intact but which include overlapping and shared living space, would similarly provide children with access to peers and parents with built-in support systems for alternating child care, coping more easily with family emergencies, and easing the

⁶⁸Ourselfs and Our Children, p. 205.

⁶⁹Ourselfs and Our Children, pp. 179-185.

combination of work and family responsibilities carried by both male and female household members.⁷⁰

The idea of development I have merely sketched here also allows for a fairly definitive formulation concerning what should count as abuse and neglect. These ideas are, I think, not very controversial, at least among those adults that live with and care for children, and by the standards they provide the modern private family is deserving both of serious criticism and considerable acclaim.⁷¹ On the one hand many, many families (of all sorts) help to provide many, many children with significant others, predictability, and the chance to engage in some sort of valued activity. The intense love that often comes with the intimacy of the private family helps people to forge commitments, to make sacrifices for each other, in short, to care for each other. On the other hand, our private families often mean isolation for their members from any sort of supportive community. Our families and households are situated in a highly stratified class society, which makes for all sorts of pressures, insecurities, and feelings of powerlessness and inadequacy.⁷² Often these

⁷⁰"A Bio-social Perspective on Parenting," p. 23.

⁷¹Most abusers of children believe, at some level, that what they are doing is wrong. Many ask for help in a variety of direct and indirect ways. See Ourselves and Our Children, p. 224, and pp. 257-258.

⁷²On the effects of class on children, see Kagan, "The Child in the Family," pp. 47-50.

factors help lead people who were abused and mistreated as children to, as parents, abuse their children in turn. There are, as Bettelheim says more than once, no neglected or beaten children on the kibbutz, as compared to one to two million cases each year in the United States.⁷³

A "Minimalist" Defense of Family

This sober note makes an appropriate starting point for my "minimalist" defense of family, as, far from claiming that the modern family has no drawbacks, I only argue that we (of western modernity) need something like it if we are to strive towards a less normalizing and oppressive order. I want however to make clear that "minimalist" does not mean tentative and uncertain. I refer instead to the fact that I am purposely broad and lacking in detail in my specification of what counts as a family and rather narrow in what it is about this wide range of families which I am defending. I am not for example arguing that "the family" makes the best selves or is necessarily the appropriate locus of community. And I do not have a problem (per se) with either the "decline of parental authority" or the proliferation of alternative householding arrangements.

⁷³On the kibbutz, see The Children of the Dream, p. 297. On Abuse in th U.S., see Ourselves and Our Children, p. 257.

On the other hand I am not tentative in my opposition to large-scale state or community run child care. On a more affirmative note, I am arguing that we should aggressively move to support people in their attempts to live in a multiplicity of types of household. This means, as I said at the outset of the chapter, that we should fight for social and economic change and public policy which makes our societies more pro-parent, pro-guardian, pro-household and pro-child. I promise to give some examples of what such change and such policy might be, but first some defense of these various propositions.

Adrienne Rich, like Barrett and McIntosh, is very critical of the modern family and the institution of "motherhood" that goes along with it. Unlike them, however, she is careful to distinguish this oppressive family -- the "patriarchal family" -- from the family per se. This is in part because of her concern with the implications of collective child-care.

This book is not an attack on the family or on mothering, except as defined and restricted under patriarchy. Nor is it a call for a mass system of state-controlled child-care. Mass child-care in patriarchy has had but two purposes: to introduce large numbers of women into the labor force ...and to indoctrinate future citizens.⁷⁴

⁷⁴Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution (New York: W.W. Norton, 1976), p. 14.

In fact there is good reason to be suspicious of collective child care under any conceivable modern conditions, not only under "patriarchal" ones.⁷⁵ For the sake of the unregulated diversity essential to politics, for the sake of protection from normalizing or repressive observations and interventions, and I think for the sake of a richer, more multi-textured and multilply satisfying life, we need to draw lines of some kind between the public and the private. This means for one thing that we should avoid state directed child care as much as possible (while at the same time using the state as a vehicle to support people in the caring of children). First I will speak of modern conditions and their relevance. Second I will discuss the need for a category of, and institutional supports for, the "private." And third, I will connect this to the question of child-rearing and private households.

To speak of the relevance of modernity I need only return to the arguments I made in chapter one. Consider the following. First, the modern ideas of legitimacy, freedom, and authority place high demands on the self. Modern order, and modern governments, demand more than

⁷⁵And on the other hand, should people create for themselves a society which is not systematically unfair to women, it will probably nonetheless be deserving of some attack. I discuss the issue of patriarchy shortly.

obedience and more than ritualized endorsement; they demand reflective endorsement and they require from people behaviour that reflects endorsement.

Modern selves are indeed reflective, and this means not only that they are capable of a variety of modes of thought and action, but also that they are structured on the basis of a good deal of self-discipline, and quite able to impose still more. We (modern people) are thematizers, aggressively defining reality and seeking the self-conscious mastery of it. We therefore readily construct categories of normality and deviance, putting pressure on ourselves and others to fit into the former.

Modern orders, like modern selves, are highly structured; they are governed by demanding imperatives and require considerable levels of self-conscious administering. It is true that we ought to move to lessen the imperatives that so constrict our decisions, collective and otherwise, but it seems inconceivable that we can in the foreseeable future either do without wide scale (not merely local) "social policies" of some kind, or make and implement such policy without imposing on people in a variety of ways. As I said in chapter one, normalization is not only made necessary by our complex interdependence, it is also provided with a perfect pretext.

And, of course, we of modernity are what humans may always have been: we are homesick, and given to philosophies of concord. These facts of modernity will not go away, and so it is important that we maintain some distinctions between various arenas of activity and experience. More exactly, we need to continue to recognize some areas of life as "private" relative to others. We ought to do this on the one hand for the sake of democracy and politics, and on the other hand for the sake of the preserving the possibility of the experiences particular (in modernity) to more "private" arenas.

Democracy under conditions of a high degree of self-consciousness requires (consists of) at least two things. It requires first the reality of a space where anyone can speak and speak more or less to everyone. Talking counts as "speaking" in this case only if it is of relevance to possible collective action. This means there must be structural room for different courses of action and a cultural ethic in support not only of free speech but of the importance of listening to what other people have to say.

This can be called the realm of "the public," although, as Jean Elshtain has pointed out, it is important that we conceive of this space, not as a pristine arena that floats above everyday concerns but as the very realm where

we contest the question of what needs to be done. It is important to idealize politics in the sense that we therefore believe that (in Connolly's words) it can be "the medium through which essential ambiguities can be expressed and given some redress," but we should not idealize politics as a realm of misty ideals. This will only lead some into public life for the wrong reasons, lead others to scorn politics as for the light-headed, and create pessimism when people discover just how down and dirty politics really is.⁷⁶

The second "thing" required by modern democracy are places where people can speak and not be entirely "in public." This is important because the force of the public world (with all its imposing definitions of reality) can only be held accountable and possibly transformed given the possibility of silence, of concealment, and of the alteration of public discourse in more private speaking. Moreover what is at issue here is more than "room," or physical space free from surveillance. Democracy and slack require multiple ways of speaking, and this in turn requires a pluralism of loyalties and dependencies. This means more than one mode of existence; it means opportunities to play different characters and to assume different stances, without an

⁷⁶Public Man, Private Woman, pp. 346-349.

unchecked insistence on a complete absence of contradiction. I cannot resist the obvious metaphor. "Checks and balances" at the governmental level do nothing to control the power of normalization (and in the U.S. at this time they do little more than abet private power). For this checks must exist at the level of the social construction of the self.

I want to stress that this idea of democracy includes more than this call for multiple institutions, loyalties, and realms of experience. It is also the insistence that any way of demarcating and constituting realms of society is problematic, even hurtful, although at the same necessary and inevitable. The fact of social forms hurts us not simply, or primarily, at the level of a compromise and sacrifice of individual interests, but at the level of a compromise and sacrifice of possible ways of being. In modern societies, or at least in modern liberal capitalist societies, a good deal of such injury is disguised by means of the public/private distinction. It does not necessarily follow, however, that we should address the injury by stripping away the status of private from all arenas. Instead we need structural slack, multiple ways of speaking, and politics both at the level of the public and the private.

I am not, then, by any means denying the cogency of the recent politicizing of the distinction between the public

and the private as carried out by feminism. Far from it. In pointing out that "the personal is political," feminism has led to the new and important problematization of "the family," and this book is therefore entirely in its footsteps. The personal is indeed political, in that it is a contestable social construction that has impositional effects. This is not, by my reading, an argument against the private, but a way to tear down the immunity from critique claimed under liberalism for all that is currently deemed private.

In fact, in my view the cause of gender justice is best served by the effort to preserve and expand the realms of concrete human relations, and alternative spaces for speaking and experience, without imposing on women a construction of themselves as if they lived for mother's day each year. Along these lines, a good deal of feminist criticism rightly insists on the independent value and validity both of the experiences women have in so far as they are women, and of the experiences and relations anyone can have in those realms, such as the household, which are still socially marked as uniquely the province of women.⁷⁷ Householding and the practices and experiences that go with it have their own value; they are

⁷⁷See for example Gilligan's In a Different Voice, and Noddings' "An Ethic of Caring" provide examples of this kind of feminist criticism.

not simply a means to some external end. The very fact that so many people find a great deal of value in the experiences of "family" -- even in normalizing and normalized families -- is a point in favor of that institution. Nor should we forget that we, as highly structured, reflective, modern selves, are capable of diverse loyalties, conflicting identifications, and multiple modes of expression and action. The continuation of a public/private distinction, enforced by the construal of some claims to a "right to privacy" as legitimate, is essential if we are to preserve, and to make, room for such richness and diversity.

This defense of privacy is reinforced by the fact that much of what we value most in the realms we deem private cannot be replicated in more public contexts. This is perhaps partly due to what Elshtain states as a general human truth -- "particular experiences and spheres of social relations exude their own values and purposes, and have ends not attainable by, or within, other spheres."⁷⁸ It is also partly due to the current, and likely continued, nature of modern communities; they are large in scale, complex in their requirements, and encompass a good deal of diversity. In this context any attempt to rely on public settings to provide humans with intimacy and

⁷⁸Elshtain, Public Man, Private Woman, p. 334-335.

spontaneity is likely to lead to their appearance in caricatured form, exploited to suit public imperatives.

Privacy, Democracy, and Private Householding

For the sake of democracy and multiplicity, then, we need a public/private distinction. This means, as I have already just suggested, that we need to continue to organize daily life by means of small, relatively intimate and stable households in which children are raised and which have some claim to shelter from the inquisitive eyes of society. This is because privacy and democracy require, at least in modern conditions, a multiplicity of institutional spaces, none of which are entirely answerable to the others. The private household can be, and to some degree is, such a space, even if it is now largely colonized by imperatives of order.

When I say "household" here I also mean "family," a place where people live together, sharing time and space, exchanging unpaid services, committed to staying together over time, and participating in rituals or traditions that somehow mark the fact that one aspect of their identity is as members of that group.⁷⁹ When I say that we should

⁷⁹"Family" is so defined in Ourselves and Our Children, p. 154. The Authors of that text in turn cite Mary Howell, Helping Ourselves (Boston: Beacon Press, 1975), Chapters 1 and 2.

organize daily life by means of households I mean that children should in general be raised as members of households. We have seen that the abolition of the private family is compatible with the the minimal grounding of identity, but the family/society distinction helps give many a personal story that is distinct from, even though bound up with, society's story. The private status of households is thus important because it helps prevent the identity of the individual from becoming too thoroughly bound up with the social order as a whole. In an age where legitimacy itself depends on the internal mental state of society's participants, this distance is valuable. It helps to put people in a position where reflection can allow for the critique of established understandings, despite the pressures on them to put their internal musings to work to bring themselves in line. The particular (and intense) experiences of family can provide a ground for resistance to the order or to some of the order's particular norms and imperatives.

To put this another way, a public/private split can make it easier to acknowledge the ambiguity of the worth of each realm, and therefore of social forms in general. In an age where power operates partially by catering to the human penchant to be at home, the private family can be (in certain conditions) a bulwark against the temptation

to treat society as a home, just as the fact that there is more than the family helps to allow for the family to be seen as less than a home.

One possible response to my argument here is that I too readily assume that collective householding arrangements are necessarily invasive and authoritarian. Things may be that way now, someone might say, but it could be different. Barrett and McIntosh for example acknowledge that "increases in social control" over child-rearing "currently take" the form of "interventions into private life," and parents, who "bear most of the work and costs of bringing up children" are not unjustified in their resistance to these interventions.⁸⁰ They suggest, however, in keeping with their assumptions of concordance, that increases in social control need not take a pernicious, interventionist form. After all ...

The social services departments of local authorities, the health visitors, the school welfare officers, are scarcely the agencies that socialists have in mind when we call for greater social responsibility for children.⁸¹

What then do they have in mind? No direct answer is given, but their conclusion seems clear to me; they think that one day there will be less of a private realm into

⁸⁰The Anti-social Family, p. 134.

⁸¹The Anti-social Family, p. 134.

which there could be interventions by outside agencies. Affairs that use to be considered "private" -- "making meals, cleaning and housekeeping, and the work of caring for people" -- will be managed more "collectively," and so "social control" will be achieved without the costs it has now.

My response to this is two-fold. On the one hand, the ideal of people managing their own lives together, cooperatively, is both beautiful and important. People's lives are in fact "managed" in many ways right now, only the appearance of "privacy" disguises this and prevents it from being a political issue. Moreover, many of the tasks Barrett and McIntosh refer to can and ought to be more cooperative affairs. Indeed, the historically recent demise (but not death) of various more cooperative forms of living (everything from mass transportation to the sharing of child care in urban neighborhoods) has meant higher costs, more inequality, and more isolation, especially for women.

On the other hand, it is very important, especially given modern conditions that we either cannot or should not dispense with, not to speak as if we can render our social world and our processes for dealing with collective issues entirely benign in their import. We cannot. We cannot do so because to deal with collective issues is to

take part in a particular way of life and so in a particular, hardly benign, way of producing human identities and systems of value. "Intervention" is in a sense a part of the human condition; it need not come from the "outside" to exist.

In fact the assumption of concordance involved in the vision of entirely non-coercive "social control" is likely in practice to serve as a tool of a kind of coercion. Harmony is the expected outcome, once the community is deciding things "for itself." And the participants of that community are then expected to "voluntarily" reach the expected consensus. They are not only supposed to go along with the result; they are expected to endorse it as well. This is especially likely to result in a squelching of spontaneity and difference for two reasons. First, in modernity persons are subjects who seek to see themselves as having freely endorsed the conditions of their existence and who can police themselves for inconsistency very thoroughly. Second, the collective issues that have to be dealt with can all too easily be construed as rational or scientific questions with only a few logical outcomes. In these conditions, the establishment of communal society promises to enhance forces of normalization and oppression.

Practical Applications

This may seem to leave us in a difficult spot. After all, as we have already seen, our families currently aid and abet in the same forces of oppression and normalization which would probably be enhanced in a modern communal society. To summarize, the problem stems on the one hand from the alluring but in many ways disempowering nature of the promise of harmony offered by "the family," and on the other hand from the many-sided enforcement of the norm of the privatized, successful, "middle-class" family. A central part of this enforcement is what Donzelot calls the systems of tutelage and contract, and, as the effects of class position on children suggest, these systems are able to normalize partly by virtue of the operation of the disparity between them. The world of liberalized relations and middle class values has its other (real and imagined) in the world of the dependent -- the former way of life is offered as superior to the latter, as indeed it is, thanks especially to the stigma and the deprivations this polarity creates; the person who accepts the proffered norms can see themselves as "free" and "responsible," relative to those who are "no good."⁸²

⁸²Donzelot speaks of an "effective dynamic" between "the working class pole and the bourgeois pole." Policing, p. xxi. On the nature and political significance of citizen/other distinctions see William E. Connolly, Appearance and Reality in Politics (Cambridge University Press, 1981), pp. 157-172, and Richard Sennett and Jonathan Cobb, The Hidden Injuries of Class (Vintage

What can we do about all this? Here are some broad guidelines and some specific possibilities which are in keeping with the position I have taken regarding the ambiguity of the modern family.⁸³ There are many possible issues from which to draw examples -- we need to change public policies that deal with families, we need to change schools, and we need to change the economic context in which families make their way. I speak selectively, beginning with possible changes at the level of families.

We need to distinguish carefully between cooperative arrangements, communal arrangements and collective arrangements. The latter will too thoroughly dissolve distinctions between the public and private. Cooperative and communal ways of living and raising children, on the other hand, are typical alternatives modes of private householding, and what we need is a proliferation, or at least a legitimation, of alternatives. What we need, in general, is to reduce normalizing pressures as far as possible by supporting people better in their own efforts to live in a multitude of ways. At this time many

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Books, 1973), pp. 135-141.

⁸³Interestingly enough, the changes I recommend at the level of families are a lot like the recommendations of Barrett and McIntosh. Their specific ideas about what to do in the present are excellent; it is their long-term vision and its assumptions of concordance that I question. See The Anti-social Family, pp. 131-159.

government laws and employer policies assume that people live families with one primary wage earner, with another parent available for full time day care. Policy should neither assume that this is the case nor try to make it so. One thing that governments can do is to provide substantial "child allowances" -- payments or tax rebates to households for each child that is raised there. (Many governments provide these in some form already, but they are not available in the United States.⁸⁴ There they might fare well politically if they were conceptualized as social insurance for children.⁸⁵ What is critically important is that they be provided as a universal benefit, not as part of a means tested welfare program, and that "household" be defined very broadly.

We also need government subsidies which make a wide range of day care programs available and affordable. One of the important principles here (and in general) is that parental (or guardian) control should be maximized. Efforts to help children and their caretakers should as far as possible not replicate the bureaucratic, standardized, professionalized school system. (We should

⁸⁴On child allowances in Europe, see Harrell R. Rodgers, Jr., The Cost of Human Neglect: America's Welfare Failure (M.E. Sharpe, 1982), p. 106.

⁸⁵See Mary Jo Bane, Here To Stay: American Families in the Twentieth Century (New York: Basic Books, 1976), p. 129.

also try to reform the schools to introduce more variation and non-professional and parental input.) Instead support should be directed to help non-institutional forms of the sharing of care proliferate.⁸⁶ Woolsey has argued persuasively that parents prefer such forms of help, This is better for parents (they prefer it) and it is, as I have already said, certainly fine for children.⁸⁷

People who are poor have for years used networks of caring such as multi-family households to help share the meager resources in the community and to help parents work. In highly unequal societies, however, personal solutions to public problems tend to perpetuate the problems, and the networks of sharing can stand in the way of the available upward mobility, even as they remain essential for maintaining day-to-day living. Ranya Rapp calls this effect "leveling."

No one gets ahead because individual upward mobility can be bought only at the price of cutting off the very people who have contributed to one's survival. Upward mobility becomes a terribly scarring experience under these circumstances.⁸⁸

⁸⁶See the excellent discussion of what is needed in Ourselves and Our Children, pp. 204-208.

⁸⁷Woolsey has shown that parents prefer forms of day care that keep the responsibility with relatives, friends, or in the home. "Pied-Piper Politics," p. 132.

⁸⁸"Family and Class in Contemporary America," p. 179.

Matters are often made worse by welfare programs, which act to weaken or dissolve these support networks, even as they fail to provide their recipients with any real means to success and make them especially vulnerable to surveillance and other actions in violation of rights normally enjoyed by others.⁸⁹ In general welfare helps set up the poor as an example for others; it helps people marginally (and importantly!), but it helps also to maintain the system of inequality in which some people are poor.

This brings us to the issue of the social and economic context in which families operate. Much can be done to improve the welfare system -- it could be less stigmatizing, invasive, and destructive of actual families -- but it will continue to have serious negative effects as long as there is a high degree of structured inequality and a high cost of living (as exist for example in the United States). Just to give one reason why this is the case, in the United States there are so many people who are poor, near poor, or seriously struggling to make ends meet that any welfare system which provides adequate

⁸⁹Colin C. Blaydon and Carol B. Stack show how welfare programs fail to take the actual structure of poor families and households into account (perhaps in order to enforce the normal route of upward mobility). "The emphasis is on legal relationships, not living arrangements." See "Income Support Policies and the Family," Daedalus 106, no. 2 (Spring 1977), p. 149.

payments and does not seriously deter work would be prohibitively expensive.⁹⁰ Similarly, day care programs by themselves can only have quite limited results.⁹¹

To state my position in the form of a general principle, we must make what counts for success in society compatible with a variety of householding arrangements. This means changes are needed both in the way work life is structured and in the way goods are consumed. It means, more than anything else, less inequality. It means, at a minimum, full employment.

By "full employment" I mean a state of affairs where there are enough good jobs for everyone. What a "good job" must provide depends on what social benefits government provides; the important thing is that one way or another people are liberated from struggling against each other to avoid or escape all that now goes with membership of the lower rungs of society. Full employment would increase the tax rolls, save the government money in benefits that go to the unemployed, increase the

⁹⁰On the degree of inequality and the cost of living in the U.S., see Michael H. Best and William E. Connolly, The Politicized Economy, Second Edition (D.C. Heath, 1982), pp. 49-59, and Harrington, The New American Poverty, p. 88. On the exorbitant cost of any government provision of adequate income within the confines of the current system of inequality, see Harrington's discussion of Nixon's Family Assistance Plan, The New American Poverty, pp. 32-33.

⁹¹See Woolsey, "Pied-Piper Politics," p. 143.

bargaining power of all workers, give people more breathing room to be political or different, work wonders in reducing disparities in income that fall along racial and sexual lines, and remove what is probably the number one source of stress for people in families. Full employment, especially if combined with reduced inequalities at the workplace and in wealth and income, could also lead to new political coalitions between the middle and lower strata of society (now closer), and so considerably alter the balance of power in the direction of these groups.

There are a number of reforms in the workplace that fall short of full employment but would still help people in families. These include improved parental leave and sick pay policies, an atmosphere where parents could bring their children to work, and shorter work days and work weeks. Changes in these areas are badly needed. But any such reforms will fail to reach many unless there are changes in "the structure of consumption" and the system of occupational incentives which are such a central part of contemporary western systems of inequality.

This means on the one hand moving away from a heavy reliance on "external" and "individual" incentives such as the promise of promotion, the fear of getting fired, and the hope of becoming rich. We need rather to emphasize

internal and shared incentives, such as fulfilling work and social relationships and the chance to contribute "to some collectivity with which one identifies."⁹² It means on the other hand expanding society's provision of "inclusive goods" which are for collective consumptions. Such goods -- mass transit, preventive health care -- are generally more cost-efficient and are clearly more egalitarian.⁹³

A Note on Patriarchy

One important objection that might be made to my whole argument is that it fails to adequately confront the issue of patriarchy and its links to the family. I want therefore to say a few words about what I see as the implications of my argument on this question.

I should say first that I don't use the word "patriarchy" myself for several reasons. For one thing it refers to a specific idea of political authority and legitimacy -- the rule of fathers -- which has been put more or less to rest in the victory of liberalism over patriarchalism. More importantly for me it implies a very total claim -- that human life is uniformly marked by the rule of men over women. I think this gives too little

⁹²Best and Connolly, The Politicized Economy, p. 64.

⁹³Best and Connolly, The Politicized Economy, p. 6.

credit to women and is not the case. And, perhaps most importantly, "patriarchy" to me implies that the subjection of women is due to the rule by, and ascendancy of men. This I think insufficiently acknowledges the way "the social construction of gender" creates "men" as well as "women."⁹⁴ Thus, while men benefit from the subjection of women (although it is also to their disadvantage in some ways), and at times men should be held accountable for the subjection of women, they do not exactly "perpetrate" it.

I must however say secondly that, while words are important, we should not allow a word quibble to make us lose sight of the point. The modern institution of family is indeed centrally implicated in the process of normalizing its participants into a set of gender categories which disadvantages and disempowers women relative to men. In modernity some very old categories and practices continue still to be of great harm and disadvantage to women. And, while some have faded in power or been repudiated, there are new ones. In particular the idealization of "home" in the mid-

⁹⁴On "the social construction of gender," see Gayle Rubin, "The Traffic in Women: Notes on the 'Political Economy' of Sex," Toward an Anthropology of Women, ed. by Rany R. Reiter (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1975), pp. 157-210. Rubin argues that biological sex is constructed socially in the form of gender.

nineteenth century not only rationalized new forms of production and consumption, but also perpetrated new forms of isolation and exclusion on women.⁹⁵

This should not lead us to hastily conclude that the subjection of women is inherently tied to distinctions such as those between family, society, and government. It stems rather first from the way those realms are accorded value and constructed as most fully the province of one particular gender (women), and second in the way that gender is constructed so as to make society's valuations and assignments seem rational, legitimate and even desirable. Hegel is not wrong when he asserts that the private household can be a locus of ethical life, but he is wrong when he claims that this private version of community is distinctly secondary to the mediated ethical life of state, and he is also wrong when he argues that women partake more directly of nature than men and so are fit more fully for the home.

The first of these two claims is reversed to some degree by the philosophy of liberalism, which understands the essence of ethical life to be a private matter. The second claim, that women are closer to nature, is still alive and kicking, although under pressure. Men and women alike tend to accept the idea that typically male

⁹⁵See Rich, Of Woman Born, pp. 46-49.

activities are more cultural, more world-making and more distinct from those of other species than the typical activities of women. It is in keeping with this that both family and women are thought of as closer to nature, more immediate, and perhaps even less uniquely human than men and the extra familial realms of life. It seems then that the secondary status of women has one of its key props intact as long as the "natural" is taken to mean women more than men and the family more than society.

The abolition of family is, however, not the answer here. Instead we need to challenge what from my perspective is Hegel's most important mistaken claim -- that a moral concord exists in the cosmos. Hegel assumes that nature provides that which is needed for ethical life, and he holds out as a model for a good society one free of mere necessity, dirt, inaccessibility of reality to reason, and ambiguity. The philosophy of discordance challenges this hope as misguided, and demands that we radically problematize nature on the one hand and reason on the other. Should such a problematization take hold in society, then the assertion that women and family are "closer to nature" than men will, I think, become less meaningful and less subjugating to women (whether or not it disappears altogether).

Conclusion

The reading of modernity provided by the philosophy of discordance locates the impetus of tyrannies of normalization in the imperatives of growth and heavy requirements of coordination of modern institutions, in the weakening of people's allegiance to these institutions and the future they promise, and in the philosophies of concordance which have been the historical partners of modern institutions. From the point of view of discordance, the modern western family is an agent of normalization and a promoter of concordance, but it is not exhausted by that description. If we are to give more life to, or even merely sustain, the modern emphasis on rule by the consent of the governed, and if we are to avoid making a mockery of the modern commitment to the equal worth of persons, then we must acknowledge that we can never universalize the affluence or achieve the moral rectitude (and superiority) our order is now geared to pursue. We need to change our institutions so that the future they are building is more worthy of our allegiance, and at the same time acknowledge that no set of social forms is ever going to fully worthy of human allegiance.

This historical possibility can only come to be given transformations in many of our highly interdependent institutions and ideas, including those of family.

Struggles at many levels will be involved in such a change, but this does not mean that a complete overthrow of modern traditions is called for; instead we should hope to witness a kind of wholesale shift, a rearrangement of elements to accommodate the loosening of growth imperatives and the cultural acknowledgment of the inevitability of arbitrariness and injustice in any social form. The most complete change might not be noticed as such: this would be a transformed understanding of politics. The operative ideals of family, discourse of the family, family policy, and actual households would to some extent displace or disable the policing of families. Such policing would, without thereby coming to an end, be referred to by some metaphor which expressed its impositional and political character. It would be contested.

Speaking more broadly, family ideas and practice would come to be in and help sustain a world governed by what Connolly calls the "institutionalization of ambiguity." This means that both discourse and the day to day institutional practice with which it is bound up would act to allow, and even enforce, the acknowledgement of a dark underside of all our achievements. In such a world we would all be regularly reminded of the fact that neither the most enlightened application of reason, nor its most

careful attunement to a larger harmony of God or nature, can render even our highest achievements unambiguously legitimate. That, at any rate, is the supposition of the ontology of discordance.

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