Chapter 3: Reform: Policies and the Polity

Welfare policy reform is widely researched, but culturally unexplored. In public policy and political science welfare policy reform is a cacophony of research and recommendations, plans and evaluations, cross-country comparisons and longitudinal studies, all tied to particular places and times, with perennial problems in wont of solutions. Such work involves complex compromises between competing imperatives, and what is actionable by a Government in the policy mix is invariably a tried and trusted upcycling of existing approaches. Our book is not a contribution to policy, nor a critique of contemporary welfare policy as neo-liberal or paternalist, important as such work is, nor is this chapter a history of policy reform. Rather, our ambition is to the idea and practice of 'reform' encodes a distinctive theological inheritance, *inter alia*.

Broadly we argue that considering welfare policy as a 'governmentalising' power, with an assemblage of definitions which classify individuals as unemployed (Boland and Griffin, 2015) explains much of how welfare policy works, but does not explore its whys and wherefores – or what it means. In this chapter we explore the deeper formulation of problems that foreshadow their solution, as a theological impulse to reformat people and the polity at large

Welfare is broadly an anti-revolutionary construct (Ewald, 2020), an insurance against unrest that guarantees the State's existence, maintenance and adaptation. This idea follows in the footsteps of Machiavelli's originality as a prophet of policy-making with a deep understanding of instrumental, managerialist political thinking, and his general concern for political continuity through internal stability (Berlin, 1974). In his lesser known *Florentine Histories*, he dispassionately considers the Ciompi Revolt, an insurrection of the lowest stratum of Florentine working classes (1378), which led to revolution, overthrowing the elite and instituted a radical democracy. Machiavelli departed from the historical orthodoxy of Bracciolini, who suggested the insurection was God's wrath on the city, and Bruni who had little sympathy for the violent criminals or treating the revolt as a political movement (Winters, 2012). Machiavelli retells the story as a lesson; an excess of poverty can spill over into political violence which can even topple the Medici dynasty for a while, something every leader must keep under a keen eye.

From medieval peasant rebellions met by dispensations for the poor, to Post-War opportunities for reconstruction, the state frequently prescribes welfare as a salve to inequality and suffering, without systemic change. This is evident in the post-1968 era which saw the final evisceration of the radical left from the supposedly 'history-ending' coup de grâce of 1989. Creative destruction, chaos, the ex nihilo impulse to rise up and revolt are irreconcilable with policy reform. Although the 'Birth of the Welfare State' in the post-war era is often presented as a new perpetual settlement, it is an amalgam of older concepts from the 'poor-law' pensions, old age and child care, universal healthcare, poverty alleviation schemes, income protection that are assembled together. Importantly, it is also an explicit gesture towards rapprochement in Europe, an armistice to the continent's repeated state of fratricidal war. Welfare is a salve to moderate rather than address inequality (Pickett and Wilkinson, 2009; Picketty, 2020), to do enough to keep people off the streets, and welfare is thus on the front foot when those with wealth and power fear for their position and lives, and welfare recedes when they are comfortable.

Revolution is animated by ideologies that announce their ambitions. The current intense epoch of welfare reform (Esping-Andersen, 2002) has rippled out from the Scandinavian shift towards more activation, taking hold in the USA under Regan and Clinton, Germany in the Hartz reforms, France under Sarkozy, and Britain from Thatcher, Blair and Cameron. Yet, these reforms are just as political as revolutions, seeking to transform society in line with ideal horizons: not a revolutionary apocalypse, but an earthly 'City of God' where individuals are tested, judged and reformed.

To ground these diagnoses of welfare reform, we will examine specific welfare reforms, from crisis through politics to policy, concentrating on the recent EU Youth Guarantee. Latter we argue that welfare processes put the unemployed through trials, in an attempt to transform them. But firstly, we must clarify the matter of reformation.

Reformers

Famously, Esping-Andersen (1990) divided 'worlds of welfare' into three, based on their current disposition; Conservative systems of Spain, Italy and France, Social Democratic states like Germany and Scandinavia, and Liberal systems such as the UK, US, Netherlands and Australia. The root of this commonly accepted taxonomy, according to its author is buried in Catholic, Lutheran and Calvinist religious histories that reside in the cultural heritage of these nation states and still persists. Church and community-based charity endure in Mediterranean countries, whereas state-based entitlements and public works appeared in Lutheran states, and harsher regimes for the poor appeared in Calvinist states. 'Indeed, Calvinists simultaneously asserted that poverty was predestined and that the poor are responsible for their plight' (Kahl, 2005: 117). Strikingly it is the Calvinist reforming instinct that has come to dominate the global policy imagination, lying beneath the 'punitive turn' in welfare policy (Wacquant, 2012). Although such sharp distinctions may be exaggerated, there is a broad relationship between national religion and the development of the welfare state.

The term 'reformation' evokes the Protestant reformation of 1517, Luther, Calvin, Knox and a host of puritans who split from the Roman Church into a series of reformed churches. However, 'reform' has a much longer history in theology – most obviously in the 'reformatio' of Pope Gregory VII (1073–85), but also throughout the fifteenth century with Christian scholars such as Desiderius Erasmus, John Colet and Thomas More and others. Indeed, since before the fall of Rome, the church has continuously engaged in self-reform through synods, meetings and debates, despite the aura of dogmatic continuity which it exudes. More importantly, the church continuously works to reform its flock, the ecclesia, the people, by preaching, monastic rules, sacraments of confession, and the care for and regulation of the poor. These two dimensions of reform – of the institution by the institution *and* of the lives of the flock – are the twin foci of this chapter.

However, the urge towards reformation is not simply Calvinist, nor exclusively Protestant, but suffuses the Christian and Jewish tradition. Indeed, the transformation from the pantheon of Gods of Egyptian, Greek and Pre-Christian Rome, from polytheism to monotheism, is also a transformation in the interests of God unto reforming man's conduct. Ancient Israelite prophecy – from Amos, Isaiah, Ezekiel

to Jeremiah – was not just an excoriating critique of society, but also a demand for reform, of rulers, priests and ordinary people. In a similar vein, St. Paul's many epistles to early Christian communities, Corinthians, Thessalonians, Galatians, Romans, Ephebians and so forth are expressions of faith in the miracle of the crucifixion and resurrection, but also practical instructions for how to organise and administer the church community, directions as to how to live a good life. Thus, the impulse to reform appears to emerge from the 'world-image' of Judaism and Christianity; life as a trial of redemption set by God for the chosen people or each person.

There is a central tension between the urge to reform and revolt in these texts; ancient prophets proclaim that the final judgement is fast approaching, which has inspired millenarian religions and revolutionary movements from medieval to modern times (Cohn, 1993). By contrast, the letters of St. Paul promise the second coming, but warn individuals against resisting authority and condemn libertinism. Each letter, whether to a specific community of believers, or the whole world – the ecumene – dampens down any revolutionary sentiment and calls for a disciplined life.

While contemporary scholarship broadly recognises the influence of theological ideas on contemporary political culture, by contrast, the policy machinery of 'reform' is considered 'apolitical', as though state interventions were a purely scientific, disinterested, evidence-based governance of society in order to optimise individual and collective life – and always in balance with individual choice. Within this chapter, we will attempt not only to re-historicise the impulse to reform as firmly theological, but also demonstrate that it is manifestly political.

The Politics of History

Sequential history is ill-suited to consider the welfare state or the concept of unemployment, as its boundaries oscillates between the abstract category and the individual experience, key moments dissipate into mundane revisions, and rapid recent reorganisation antecedes research quickly. By contrast our genealogical approach begins in the present at the contemporary scene of welfare activation and then casts backwards scouring for important precursors and discontinuities. Evidently, most histories of welfare and unemployment also tend to be histories of politics, identifying strands of ideology, usually the enduring struggle between liberalism and socialism. Of course, all history-writing is political, a contribution to contemporary debates, and many contemporary writers are open about their allegiances, and generally announce their 'critical history' as a revelation of the forces at work in the past and present. By contrast, our attempt here is not to unmask the historical workings of ideological forces, for instance, neo-liberal ideology or state control, but to recognise the presence and persistence of religious ideas in shaping the institutions of today.

Starting in the present poses its own problems, because any moment in time in policy has its own minutiae – the rate of unemployment, existing welfare provisions, international labour markets, political and geopolitical demands, currents in policy-making and so forth. Yet, contemporary social policy is also relatively stable, with decades of nigh-upon consensus that unemployment and welfare are problems which should be addressed by Active Labour Market Policies (ALMPs). These are government

programmes that intervene in the labour market to help the unemployed people find work. ALMPs are work-first policy interventions to increase 'labour market participation' – either by providing job-seekers with employability orientated training or education or by forcing them to seek work actively and accept any job offers by the threat of cuts to their welfare entitlements. ALMPs reform in two ways, intervening in individual lives to reform conduct, but equally intervening in existing, 'passive' welfare institutions that rendered the unemployed 'welfare dependent'.

Starting with ALMPs is not to neglect critics, or ignore revolutionary alternatives, such as the idea of Universal Basic Income – curiously popular across left and right. However, within the circles which actually contribute to the formation of policy and therefore shape the lives of individuals, ALMPs are dominant; the question which matters is how to design and implement these policies, not whether or not these are the right policies. Recent unemployment crisis such as the global financial crisis and the COVID-19 pandemic have deepened the reformists commitment to ALMPs, suggesting that the concept of welfare as anti-revolutionary technology of society becomes more visible when the economy experiences difficulty.

Standard histories trace ALMPs to post-war Scandinavia, particularly in the 1950's Swedish Rehn-Meidner policies, where extensive social provision was popular, and activation policies were seen as important means of 'social inclusion'. The idea that welfare reform plays an important role in preventing 'labour market exclusion' is still current. These policies were adopted by the US, with a considerably harsher emphasis on conditionality, then spread to Australia, the UK and became adopted by the OECD in the 1990s, becoming EU-wide policy by the end of the century. Notable examples include welfare reforms under Blair's Labour Party, the Hartz reforms in Germany, the erosion of the rights-based French welfare state under Sarkozy (Hansen, 2019). Since then ALMPs have spread and diversified, for instance, conditional-cash-transfers, particularly in Mexico and Brazil, whereby welfare benefits depend on individuals complying with norms around health or education (Peck and Theodore, 2016). The social policy process of ALMPs involves designing measures to reform individuals, assessing whether this has been effective, and then returning to the policy drawing board for further reform. Both individuals and state policies must be optimised continuously, through whatever means, and today algorithmic targeting of interventions and 'nudge' methods from behavioural economics are increasingly deployed to hone the effectiveness of interventions (Friedli & Stearn, 2016, Struyven, 2019).

Welfare reforms assume the provision of welfare entitlements; the logic of ALMPs assumes there is something passive that needs to be 'activated'. These policies clearly emerge in response to the provision of universal state-funded benefits to the unemployed, outside of systems of contributory 'social insurance', what is today termed the welfare state. The persuasiveness of ALMPs, particularly in America is underpinned by the critique of the welfare state articulated by Von Hayek even as the Beveridge report was being published in 1942, and popularised by Milton Friedman in the post-war period. Amid these various 'neo-liberal' critics attempting to 'dismantle the welfare state' – as the standard left-wing critique phrases go, there are perhaps a very few who are in favour of eliminating actual welfare payments. Primarily, ALMPs accept that welfare payments are necessary supports to a volatile economy and unpredictable labour market. Thus there is a tension inherent within ALMPs, between providing monetary support and extracting job-seeking behaviour to support 'labour market participation'. Paradoxically, it is only through the provision of support, but making it conditional on behaviour – turning up to meetings,

making a CV, applying for jobs, retraining – that welfare offices can exert influence over the unemployed.

While Hayek and Friedman criticised the welfare state drawing on classical liberalism – that it interfered with individual right to choose and the responsibility to face the consequences, more academic discourses have been instrumental in ushering in ALMPs, obviously from economics, but perhaps surprisingly, from sociology. This is most evident in US critics who demand welfare reform in the sense of reforming the welfare state because it supposedly creates perverse incentives to refuse work; the welfare trap or the poverty trap. Simultaneously, welfare recipients are also morally condemned as having low ambitions or poor understanding of the rewards of work, but they are nonetheless presumed to be strategic actors. For instance, Charles Murray (2006) suggests that some young men 'prefer' doles to work, or that some women use pregnancy as a strategy to assure welfare support. More recently in the UK Andrew Dunn (2014) described the 'choosiness' of welfare recipients who would not accept simply any work whatsoever, echoing the political discourse of generations of Conservative party politicians, but most importantly, Ian Duncan Smith and David Cameron, architects of welfare reforms which introduced harsh conditionality and activation, leading to unprecedented levels of sanctions (Watts and Fitzpatrick, 2018, Dwyer, 2019).

A key figure here is Lawrence Mead (1986, 1997, 1993), a prominent political activist researcher whose well-argued yet polemical books became welfare policy in the United States and beyond. His work offered a more polished political rationale for the *work-first* reform of his precursors Charles Murray and George Gilder. Echoing American President Regan, Mead argued in the *New Politics of Poverty* that the old problem the welfare state addressed of economic equality was obsolete, replaced by the new problem of 'dependency of the poor'; individuals enfeebled by the post-war welfare state. Supposedly 'government' was the problem and the absence of a work ethic amongst the poor threatened the legitimacy of all anti-poverty programmes (Mead, 1997). The reforms Mead sought were authoritarian work first policies underwritten by punitive sanctions to jolt people into any form of paid employment however menial, dirty or low paid as a necessary prerequisite for escaping poverty (Wacquant, 2009). Mead came to these views from his experience as a policy advisor on welfare issues for the Nixon administration, and he appeals to evidence basis in social policy, but also political polling. The combination of a scientific approach to data and clinical disdain for the subject of his surveillance is particularly evident in his practical experiments in Wisconsin and New York. Simultaneously he articulates a zealous personal commitment to identifying the welfare state as a political failure and poverty as an individualised moral failing.

Strikingly, right-wing critics of welfare have begun to adopt the vocabularies of the left-wing to their own purposes, talking of 'learned dependency' or the 'culture of poverty'. These ideas can be critically described as 'psy-science' or pop-psychology (Friedli & Stearn, 2015), but even more uncomfortably, they are recognisably sociological. Indeed, Mead's phrases 'underclass' and the 'non-working poor' to focus welfare politics around a problem of *conduct* habituated by social conditions. For Mead, the growth of the welfare state simply multiplies problems because it corrupts people's work-ethic, making them dependent upon the generosity of others, supposedly leading to a downward spiral of indigence, incompetence and even criminality. Thus, rather than simply re-arranging the system of incentives – making work pay and suchlike – these reformers envisage a system which totally transforms people: *"In progressive-era politics the issue was government control of the economy; in dependency*

politics it is government supervision of behaviour." (1993: 112 – italics in original). In particular, Mead envisages the state managing the young, intervening in cases of passivity and weakness. Furthermore, he positions the left as defending the 'status-quo' of the welfare state, while the right 'ushers in a new political age' (ibid.: 114). Strikingly – this echoes Jeremiah, condemning the present and harking back to an imagined past (Bercovitch, 2000).

While ALMP is a neologism, this tension between giving support and demanding compliance with economic and social norms has a long history. Roosevelt's speech introducing the comprehensive welfare in the face of the 1930s depression explicitly addresses the fear of welfare dependency. The end of the Great War in Europe in 1919 necessitated direct welfare payments, wholly funded by the state, regardless of the 'social-insurance' principle, and during the 1920s these temporary emergency measures proved hard to withdraw, and the 1920s saw multiple attempts to introduce time limits and conditionality until the Great Depression led to the 1934 Unemployment Act more or less temporary provisions permanent (Fraser, 2006). Before the war, policy wrestled with abolishing the Poor Laws, and associated institutional workhouses for the destitute, through the introduction of Bismarkian social insurance and labour exchanges. Indeed the debates that surrounded the introduction and multiple reforms of the poor laws, particular the poor-law reforms in 1834, all address the politics of universal welfare and individualising conditionality and behavioural reform.

Much research explores the governance structures, policy formation and evaluation of ALMPs in different countries (de Graaf et al. 2012). For their proponents, ALMPs are a given, considered as effectively the only option in an austere economic context to expand interventions into the lives of the unemployed, as passive benefits are no considered viable (Bonoli, 2013). Following critics of welfare, ALMPs pose the 'problem' of unemployment in terms of the individual – requiring training on the 'supply side' of the market if not explicitly blaming claimants (Baachi, 2015). Evocatively, activation policies have been equated to a 'trampoline' rather than the 'safety net' of older modes of welfare (Giddens, 2013). Critics of activation policies abound, and allege that not only do they push individuals into precarious work, impose cruel psychological punishment, stigmatise individuals, but they are ineffective at reducing unemployment, especially for youths (Leschke et al. 2018, Tyler, 2020).

Our interest here is less in contributing to these debates about the effect or efficacy of these ALMPs. Of course, the outcomes of these policies matter immensely – 'by their fruits you shall know them' (Mathew, 7:20). But here we argue that it is not enough to know a system by its fruits; instead we have to understand how these policies and systems think. So, from our birds-eye view of history we descend to the thickets of policy, to examine the contemporary EU-wide *Youth Guarantee*, the ALMP which sought to heal the last crisis, whose diagnosis and remedy for unemployment will no doubt be prescribed again in the near future.

Back to the Future

Formally adopted by the Council on 22 April, 2013, the *Youth Guarantee* (YG hereafter) aspires to offer a good apprenticeship, training, education or employment opportunity to all unemployed young people

within four months of their leaving employment or education. The guarantee is a strange hybrid of the modern and the archaic. Archaic in its formulation as a promise from the sovereign power and modern in that it manifests on implementation as a pragmatic platform of various improvised or an ad hoc, local structures and technical ALMPs. YG is a modification to ALMPs in four distinctive ways: it offers a guarantee (Bussi and Geyer, 2013), it imposes a metricised objective on the state (Besamusca et al., 2012; Bussi and Geyer, 2013), it including long-form human capital development as well as immediate employability responses to unemployment and economic inactivity and finally, though incompletely it transforms the national problem of youth unemployment into a continental issue that cannot be solved by national economies.

YG's radicalism is a reaction to high levels of youth unemployment – cresting 23% across the EU, but as high as 58% in Greece and 55% in Spain, and the fear that an entire generation of Europeans was being left behind or permanently scarred and that if left unaddressed might endanger the European model (Scarpetta et al. 2010). Parallel to ALMPs the concept of a *Youth Guarantee* had emerged in Scandinavian countries, but in the 1990s, targeted at marginal groups of youths who might suffer 'labour market exclusion', quite distinct from the case of mass youth unemployment across the EU. Crucially, these YGs are ALMPs as they focus on 'activating' the individual, promoting labour market participation rather than directly creating jobs or instituting job-sharing. Whether *work-first* or oriented to 'building human capital' these policies are all oriented to getting individuals to work, turning them into jobseekers, making them participate in the economy.

Mass unemployment resulted from the Great Financial Crash of 2007-8, and the ensuing recession was marked by austerity policies across Europe especially (Springer, 2016, Coulter & Nagle, 2015). Remarkably, despite general cuts to spending, states increased investment in activation policies during this period. As job-losses during recessions take longer to recover than economic growth and capital investment, international institutions took the initiative by focusing on employment. Supported by the UN, the ILO promoted a 'Global Jobs Pact' in 2009 – which offered specific policy recommendations alongside rhetorical declarations: 'The world must do better'... 'The world should look different after a crisis'. The 'relevant stakeholders' for this policy included states, businesses, unions, politicians and citizens, envisaged as acting in unison to achieve a common goal. Importantly, while commitments were made towards protecting the vulnerable, equalising access to jobs and environmental sustainability, the policy also recommends the use of activation policy and the extension of Personal Employment Services – a mixture of measures which certainly includes monitoring, compulsion and sanctions. The cooperative amalgam of stakeholders consulted does not include the unemployed who are targets of activation.

The YG was trumpeted as a great success by Jean-Claude Juncker as president of the European Commission in his 'State of the Union' speech in 2016. The missionary fervour for employment is palpable:

I cannot and will not accept that Europe is and remains the continent of youth unemployment.

I cannot and will not accept that the millennials, Generation Y, might be the first generation in 70 years to be poorer than their parents.

However, while youth unemployment certainly fell during this period, statistical assessments by the OECD and the ILO highlight that this probably would have happened anyway, given that unemployment

fell overall for all age groups – making the Youth Guarantee 'economic deadweight', state expenditure wasted on things that would happen anyway in the economy (See Eichhorst & Rinne 2017, Escudero & Morello, 2017). What the policy did do was institutionalise activation more strongly, by extending it to youth via early intervention, rather than waiting for the 12-months threshold which marks long-term unemployment. Early intervention, algorithmic profiling, monitored job searching, threats and implementations of sanction become routine: these are the actual labour market activities which are generated in the aftermath of political rhetoric. Even after ILO statistical analyses suggested that activation may be ineffective and that sanctions may have negative impacts on job quality or even push people out of the labour market, the policy continues, an interminable attempt to restore 'full-employment', harking back nostalgically to the past as a prescription for the future.

This is not to suggest that the YG had no effect or that it was 'irrational' in the sense of being an ineffective ideological project. Certainly, ALMPs do impact individual lives, forcing people into more extensive jobseeking, training, self-scrutiny, and forcing them to accept unsatisfactory or unfeasible work and even imposing sanctions on them – with negative consequences. However, our aim here is not to decry this 'irrationality' but to understand this particular form of 'governmental rationality', how the state imagines its citizens and the economy more broadly.

The YG is inspired by the policy term NEET – ' Not in Employment, Education or Training', coined by Istance et al (1994) to describe young people in Glamorgan, Wales who had failed to get a footing in the labour market. Echoed in the media, this term became common-parlance and a key organising concern of research and policy around young people, a problem to be tackled by individuals through responsible self-management, at the state level through Government action to responsibilise young citizens (Wrigley, 2017), and at the supra-national level most manifestly in the EU YG, but also in the UN Secretary General's Envoy 2015 focus on youth unemployment.

NEETs adds to a longer discourse where young people are considered as a troublesome population, fragile or already damaged, who need guidance through the inherent vulnerability of the complicated transition into adulthood in the labour market (Furlong & Cartmel, 2007). Effectively, the transformation of children through education and training into participants in the labour market and good workers is rendered a governmental concern (Roberts, 2004). Healthy labour markets, elsewhere or in the past, real or imagined, supposedly had a linear and seamless transition into industrial apprenticeships, employment training schemes with paternalistic employers who set people on a course for a job for life (Willis, 1977). A phalanx of youth activation schemes (in the UK - The Youth Opportunities Programme (YOP), Youth Training Scheme (YTS), Youth Training (YT) and Restart Programmes) emerged in response to the decline of such employers, as the state standing in, albeit without the offer of secure meaningful employment, and thus undirected training (Furlong & Cartmel, 2007: 41-44). The form of gendered work envisaged or perhaps more accurately, imagined or dreamed up in these schemes was aggressive, masculine and unpredictable (Simmons et al, 2014; Roberts, 2018).

Like the negative definition of unemployment – not in work, available for, seeking work, NEET refers to what the individual is not; not in work, not in education, not in training, defining youth as incomplete or even failing individuals. The construction of NEET relates any alternative use of time to paid employment (Batsleer, 2008: 34). NEET exists as an acceptable policy term for Chav (Jones, 2012), a key term in the fabric of moral underclass discourse (Levitas, 2005) associated with delinquency, anti-

social behaviour, crime, early or chaotic parenthood, dangerous political objects (Wrigley, 2017), which need to be held accountable, controlled and subject to intervention so that they learn the hard lessons of responsibility (Gillies, 2016). Indeed, Istance et al's (1994) Welsh study, which became New Labour's policy, explores the transformation of 'status zero' people into NEET. This in turn, reflects a subtle but over time meaningful transformation in the understanding of the good character of young people outside of education, employment and training (Gillies, 2016).

How can we see the wood for the trees here?

All discussions of welfare policy are interminable; there are innumerable thickets of studies and data, an apparent superfluity of data. Yet across this diversity there is continuity, most obviously in the idealisation of work and full employment. Beyond this, the idea of a free and 'functional' labour market is crucial, implying social mobility, flexibility and so forth. Occasionally, 'reducing labour market rigidities' is emphasised which in practice involves curbing trade-unions or deregulating employment law. However, the targets of ALMPs are the unemployed, like the problematic figure of the NEET, considered as raw material to be reshaped, reformed and even redeemed. Long-term unemployment is considered to lead to 'subjective deterioration' "Therefore, it is essential to intervene early, at the beginning of the unemployment spell" (Fuentes 2007: 14). Taken from an EU-level briefing on unemployment – addressing the existence and experience of literally millions of people, a singular remedy is offered:

> benefit recipients are expected to engage in monitored job-search activities and improve their employability 'in exchange' for receiving benefits. (ibid.: 10)

Whereas this recommendation appeared polemical in the works of Mead and Murray, by now it has effectively become 'evidence-based policy', a matter of statecraft and careful management of individual lives.

There are several components to these policies; they react to crises or problems, provide diagnoses of society and individuals, and suggest remedies or reforms. Both individuals and institutions are considered capable of transformation, which gradually renders them more perfect – a highly political project.

The Politics of Policy

Broadly, politics and policy are concerned with the same matters, yet approach them differently. The former is concerned with values and aspirations, contestation and struggle, transforming society through legitimised leadership. The latter is concerned with evidence and data, compromises and collaboration, optimising individual lives and social institutions through careful tinkering. Indeed, while policy shapes lives immensely, more people are aware of political discourse about welfare than the actual content of the YG or other ALMPs.

Policy is formed, within its own set of logics by objective, rational evidence, a tradition nestled in the British empiricism of Bacon, Locke, Berkley and Hume. Policy requires impeccable evidence as a precursor to understanding the problem at hand. Over centuries of 'governmentality' states have increasingly collected data about its citizens, particularly the unemployed, numbers and trends which inform policy (Foucault, 2005). Yet, the original and literal meaning of data is *a thing given* from the natural world, a gift that entangles us in cycles of generosity and reciprocity (Ingold, 2011). Contemporary social policy aspires to be 'evidence-based' science and therefore eschew this entanglement as data must be extracted clinically without contaminating the field. This usually means numerical data that is severed from context, meaning and web of social relations, which means this data is extracted rather than given. Indeed, these disciplines of knowledge are modes of truth-production which depend on state power.

The limits of state power to govern society and the economy by sovereign fiat were manifest in the violent wars and utopian impulses which generated revolutionary political regimes. An accommodation of sorts emerged in various approaches to welfare capitalism (Esping-Andersen, 1990) of Nordic social democracy, European conservatism and the neo-liberal anglosphere. Since the 1970s, as with many policy domains, a common approach to welfare has emerged across Europe, and beyond (Lind and Møller, 2006). The homogenisation and pasteurisation of national social policies around activation (Van Berkel and Møller, 2002) has reduced the sense of alternatives, the possibility of doing things differently (Fisher 2009).

Over the course of the 1970s, the golden age of welfare capitalism ended, auguring in the start of the end of welfare diversity and innovation. The continual process of opening up markets to competition, particular the logic of recrafting supply chains to areas of location specific advantage lead to the rapid collapse of entire, labour intensive sectors of national economies in many industrialised countries. Against this backdrop, from the 1980s capital asserted itself politically with the rise of the new right in many countries (Hall, 1988), evoking a doctrine of minimalist, 'night-watchmen' approach to Government (Nozick, 1974), albeit one that was destined to repeatedly fail. Similarly, the welfare state was critiqued as an overly-ambitious failure, perhaps it liberated society from extreme poverty, but at the price of permanent subjugation, and thereby, robbing of individuals of their autonomy and sense of personal progress and potential (Ewald, 2020).

In short, the welfare state was portrayed as a machine for fabricating rights without demanding responsibility; it deprived individuals of the need to act responsibly, while sharing their risks with multitudinous others. Furthermore, critics argued that welfare was increasingly unaffordable; there were limits to financial solidarity in society, to what the economy would support, particularly against the backdrop of preserving nationally competitive economies with globally mobile capital (Hansen, 2019). These political sensibilities led to welfare being curtailed, as governments introduced ALMPs to push the unemployed into work, particularly focusing on making even unattractive work pay, workfare, reducing welfare traps, and cynical insights from behavioural economics to govern the vulnerable using sanctions (Tyler & Slater, 2018).

Supposedly, 'it is easier to imagine an end to the world than an end to capitalism' a quote attributed to both Fredric Jameson and Slavoj Žižek (Fisher, 2009). This is usually understood to be a call to arms, for revolutionary action. Clearly, the 'end of history' pronounced prematurely by Fukuyama in

1989 is a post-revolutionary process of endless reform. Yet, the urge towards reform is historically entangled with the demand for revolutionary transformation.

Sceptics often rhetorically describe ideals as 'utopias' and within a Western context, these are often 'Millenarian', in the Judeo-Christian orientation towards the apocalyptic 'end of the world'. Such 'end-time' visions are close to socialist dreams of revolution – an eschatological vision of sudden total transformation, whereas ALMPs and the YG are more incremental and mundane goals, horizons to be pursued relentlessly. Interestingly, millennial hopes within the Christian tradition equally can refer to the anticipation of a 'thousand-year reign' of a near perfect 'heaven on earth'. Such an 'intra-mundane eschatology' means the attempt to establish a perfect or pure society – traditionally in the form of the ecclesia, but now in the form of a perfectly free and open market (Schwarzkopf, 2020). In this sense, contemporary reform of welfare through 'activation' pursues the horizon of a perfect labour market; a place where consensual actors with perfect information make decisions and enter into contracts continuously. This modern 'city of God' entails continuous tests of each individual who makes choices and develops themselves continuously in a constant pilgrimage of 'self-realisation'.

The political horizons of ALMPs, the quest for full-employment and flexible labour markets is clearly non-revolutionary, or presumes that the necessary revolutions have already occurred. They carry the hope that governmental activation will shape individuals to better participate in society so that they develop their 'inner' potentials and talents; as per Adam Smith's vision of economic man: 'Every man lives by exchanging or becomes to some measure a merchant and the society itself grows to be what is properly a commercial society' (2003: 31). Government seeks to produce a properly 'commercial society' where there is relatively perfect information and choice so that individuals can sell their labour actively; It hopes to create an integrated society through collective and individualised responsibility for economic activity and the provision of institutional supports for human capital. Everyone will work, in multiple jobs and contracts, and be investors, shareholders and consumers in a perfect market which generates optimal outcomes for all. Rather than prophesising the imminent arrival of the apocalypse, it preaches a good life, personal redemption, salvation – perpetual reform.

These political horizons have an ambition parallel to the church; the salvation of souls. In ALMPs, salvation is by way of work, work is a vitamin that has behavioural, psychological and cultural goods (Warr, 1987), but work is also imbued with so much more inexplicable meaning. In Foucault's formulation of pastoral power, the pastor exercises careful jurisdiction over the bodies and souls of his flock to assure their salvation and in return members of the flock each owe obedience, and thus the pastorate operates through salvation, obedience and truth. The duty of the pastor is the salvation of the entire flock, so that the overall system is being saved when an individual is saved, as per the parable of the lost sheep (Matthew 18:12–14 and Luke 15:3–7).

Agamben in *The Coming Community* extends that articulation of the cycle of revelation, obedience and salvation, following Kafka he suggests that 'innermost character of salvation is that we are saved only at the point when we no longer want to be' (1993: 102). In this theological formulation, the unemployed jobseeker is understandably ambivalent about being the target of the state's efforts at salvation, ambivalent about accepting an identity that is both excluded and parasitic. In this reading, ALMPs aspire to save the system by insisting on the salvation of individuals.

Theology and theory intersect and intertwine; the history of ideas constitutes the range of possibility for our thought. Inescapably, the psychological, social or human sciences are a product of history like any other discourses and are entangled with theological modes of thought. This is not to deny their efficacy – economics, sociology, psychology, political science and so forth are powerful, and not only in the 'production of truth', but in the creation of institutions – not least the welfare state and ALMPs. Yet, these modes of thinking do not reflect the natural internal workings of the brain, but cultural legacies. This is not to say that they are ideological blinkers; rather than constraining the potential of our thinking, they constitute the possibility of our thought. Without this heritage of discourses – not a dogma but an internally diverse tapestry of ideas in constant tension – we would think very differently.

The key theoretical tenet of Western thinking is the idea of 'reform', in the sense that individuals can be reformed – they have fallen into sin and error in theological terms, or into ideology in contemporary parlance, part of the machinery of oppression and ideology, yet they can be redeemed, saved, transformed. Governmental and pastoral power require obedience, demand confessions and promise salvation (Foucault, 2007). Encoded here is a balance between two models of individuality – on the one hand the idea of an innate character, and on the other the shaping of the self through circumstances or culture. Within this model, being 'reformed' is redemption, salvation or liberation, but not a total metamorphosis, as something of the individual persists, described as the 'core/real/authentic self' in modern times or the soul in religion (Taylor, 1989). Reforming the self is in part a matter of discipline – governing the 'conduct of conduct' in Foucault's studies of the minutiae of institutions, but it goes beyond modifying behaviour to a distinctive transformation of the self.

In early theological models there are two main metaphorical models of subjective transformation – *epistrophe* and *metanoia* (Hadot, 1953). Epistrophe meant awakening or enlightenment, drawn from philosophical models of self-mastery through knowledge. Metanoia meant a transformation through purification, effectively suffering through the death of one part of the self, to be reborn as a better person. Clearly, within modern culture reformations are not simple modifications, not just adding to the self, but a painful transformation through suffering, related to knowing the truth about the world but also the truth of the self. Enigmatically, the means of transforming oneself is telling the truth about the self, yet the price of this truth is also personal transformation. The genealogical conjunction of Greek philosophy and Hellenic spiritual exercises as translated unto the early Christian monasteries is still crucial to modern thinking about individuality. 'This notion of conversions, of the return to the self, of the turning to oneself... is one of the most important technologies of the self the West has known' (Foucault, 2005: 208). Turning 'inwards', scrutinising the self, yet transforming that self are practices which suffuse our culture, from self-help to active labour market policies.

The key Biblical example of conversion is Saint Paul. As a sinner, Saul was blinded by light on the road to Damascus as the Lord speaks directly to him, and after three days of prayer, he regains his sight; 'the scales fell from his eyes', after which he leads the spread of the early Christian church, as a proponent and symbol of conversion. Saul is both changed into Paul and unchanged with the same body and memories. Conversion is a form of suffering, reflected in his blindness, relieved by his eventual baptism. The Lord clearly chooses him, making him a 'vessel' making him 'suffer for my sake' – yet not

just to be changed, but to take on a mission of action within the world, preaching the word. Told again at intervals (Acts 22, 26), the story presents a model of an overwhelming and difficult experience of encountering the divine, leading to a defining break in personal identity, the start of a new life.

Evidently metaphors abound around the reformation of the self – awakening, blindness, contrasts of dark and light, being purified or purged, freedom and slavery, dying and being born again. These metaphors are replaced by more technical sounding terms in modernity, from academic and popular psychology; 'self-transformation' 'self-work', 'changing your internal dialogue' 'discovering your true identity'. These comingle in Biblical accounts of transformation, for instance the prophet Ezekiel describes the 'heart of stone' being replaced by the 'true heart' (36: 26). To be converted is not just to acquire new beliefs but to be personally transformed:

> The hour has come for you to wake up from your slumber, for our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed. The night is nearly over; the day has drawn near. So let us lay aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light. (Romans, 12: 11-12)

> Do not lie to one another, for you have taken off the old self with its habits and have put on the new self. (Collosians, 3:9)

This proliferation of metaphors implies that conversion was a subjective internal experience which was difficult to narrate. Judith Butler's work on subject-formation similarly describes the modern idea of the new self emerging from the old as a paradox; the impossibility of a 'self-inaugurating agency' (1997: 16). Furthermore, it could be suggested that the process of conversion is itself constitutively produced by descriptions of it – the model of Paul, the metaphors of conversion – these inspire narratives of self-transformation which become self-fulfilling. These parables and their modern echoes imagine the individual in Western culture as malleable, open to endless transformations and reformations by governmental power that assesses, judges and imposes changes upon its subjects. Crucially though, transformations cannot be entirely enforced from the outside but require the self to work upon itself.

Perhaps the most famous account of conversion is Augustine's *Confessions.* Before Rousseau's *Confessions* (1782)*,* this was the most extensive auto-biography, and exemplifies the retrospective inquiry into one's own self which permeates contemporary society. For Augustine, the sins of the flesh were particularly troubling, and the *Confessio* recalls his lusts and desires repeatedly. These are represented as poor choices, made in full knowledge of immorality, both intuitively grasped and as embodied by his pious mother. Yet Augustine also offers an account of sin as socialisation:

> 'For the rule of sin is the force of habit, by which the mind is swept along and held fast, even against its own will, yet deservedly, because it fell into the habit of its own accord' (Book 8.3).

Everyone is continuously tempted to sin, and transgressing becomes a habit, harder and harder to resist, and even warps the mind, developing hypocrisy and ignorance. Here sin is not just transgression but a morally culpable form of socialisation or self-formation. Yet, within the self the possibility of choosing differently always resides, indestructibly: 'One thing lifted me up into the light of your day. It was that I knew that I had a will, as surely as I knew there was life in me. When I chose' (7.1). Like Descartes who was only sure he has a mind, a millennium beforehand Augustine was sure of his will, and therefore of his

responsibility. Resonant with the prophets or the epistles, individual choice is always affirmed, even facing an omnipotent God.

How is conversion achieved? In part it is a matter of turning around, as in the contemporary cliché 'turn your life around'. To 'convert' etymologically means to turn around which resonates with the Greek word *periagoge*, which Plato used to describe those who turned away from illusion to face reality in the famous Cave Allegory. This metaphor is certainly used by Augustine: 'O Lord, you were turning me around to look at myself.' (8.7), or in contemporary parlance 'take a good look at yourself'.

The *Confessio* is a paradigm of confession, in that Augustine relentlessly examines his own life and experiences, his conduct and choices, and admits to culpability for all the sins and errors within it. From the opening pages the narration depicts a high emotional intensity, representing a repentant sinner who considers their salvation recent, tenuous and precious. After narrating youthful robbery, debauchery and heresy, eventually Augustine is 'converted', an event marked by difficulty, struggle and self sacrifice:

> My inner self was a house divided against itself. [...] I was beside myself with madness that would bring me sanity. I was dying a death that would bring me life. (Book 8.8)

The self is metaphorically split in two here, the sinner and the soul longing for salvation. Part of the self must be excised in order to redeem the whole; sinful habits, tastes for iniquities, indulgence in heretical errors. These sinful tendencies are cast aside – shriven, in later medieval language. Yet, paradoxically, they are also retained, as part of a narrative; even sins renounced must be remembered, as admitting culpability is crucial to redemption. For Augustine, confession must be continuous, not a single ritual of purification, even though 'conversion' is a definitive event in life; yet given mankind's fallen nature, sin will recur and to pretend otherwise leads only to pride – another sin.

Even after this moment of conversion, the *Confessio* is quite relentlessly self-excoriating, which reflects Augustine's ethos of continuous self-analysis, confession and reformation.

> Day after day without ceasing these temptations put us to the test, O Lord. The Human Tongue is a furnace in which the temper of our souls is daily tried. (Book 10: 37).

Thus, the singular act of conversion, confirmed by a ritual of baptism, becomes transformed into a continuous struggle with temptation. It is a continuous test and here again, the human tongue is central, the 'truth' told about oneself forms the self decisively.

Notably, this reformation of the self is transformative, but requires chronic work, 'Salvation then is an activity, the subject's constant action on themselves' (Foucault, 2005: 184). Of course, there are many differences from contemporary society – particularly belief in supernatural forces, absolute moral commandments, the immortality of the soul and so forth, but there are also key continuities: Firstly, the self can be reformed and redeemed, but only through difficulty and suffering. Secondly, this transformation involves a sort of turning; away from the world or against the self, rejecting previous poor conduct or behaviour acquired by habit – socialisation in modern parlance. Thirdly, some outside force prompts this conversion, whether it is divine intervention, extreme experiences or the words of others in preaching or confession. Fourthly, the individual is transformed by telling the truth about themselves, usually to others, yet simultaneously, the price of knowing the truth is also a transformation of the self.

Beyond the religious resonances of salvation and conversion, the underlying idea here is that individuals are malleable – shaped like clay in Biblical accounts, socialised by circumstance and environment in sociology. Indeed, even 'high theories' such as Foucault maintain this ontology; that the subject can be transformed, externally by governmental intervention and internally by what he describes as 'techniques of self' (1988). Whatever moral or political value is placed upon particular transformations of the individual, the idea that the self can be reformed is the central model; It is a powerful idea which makes it possible to analyse different societies as shaping individuals – basically the key idea of the 'human sciences'. For critics this is sociology's 'heart of darkness' (Bauman, 1989), because it makes academic disciplines complicit in state and corporate projects of transforming society – many of which are morally dubious. Equally, this idea of reformation also makes it possible and worthwhile to invest time and effort in educating and enlightening individuals, empowering them, which may sound patronising or even colonising, yet it is the warrant for universal education as much as ALMPs. Indeed, the idea that individuals are partially products of their society and capable of change also informs an ethic of forgiveness, always holding out the possibility of redemption. Yet, rather than supporting individuals unconditionally, modern welfare gives an endless series of second chances at the same test.

Antecedent of our contemporary idea of socialisation as a mixture of individual choice and social structure are theological ideas: Choice and free will is central to individual salvation in Christianity – even though God is presumed to be omnipotent and created the world according to a divine plan, each individual is responsible for themselves: 'For God will reward every person according to what he has done' (Romans, 2.6) – or as expressed by the prophet Ezekiel centuries earlier in Judaism. This balance between individual choice and divine will is reflected in centuries of philosophical hair-splitting between 'free will and determinism' or more recently 'structure and agency' or 'power and resistance'. All of these imply the possibility of 'reform', both in the sense that the individual is shaped by their environment and culture, but has the individual capacity to make choices and better themselves:

> For the rule of sin is the force of habit, by which the mind is swept along and held fast, even against its own will, yet deservedly, because it fell into the habit of its own accord' (Augustine: Book XIII: 3: 165)

Thus, the work of transforming or reforming the self is interminable, but it cannot take place without individual involvement – as expressed above by the classical theologian St. Augustine, and repeated in the 'great medieval synthesis' of Thomas Aquinas: 'God indeed causes the things we do but not without our acting, for he works in every will and nature' (ibid.: 660). Rather than a theological 'dogma' which requires 'faith' in mystery, this theology is a theory of human existence, with a tension between circumstances and choice, which informs how we think today – in sociological theory, in everyday life and within governmental policy making, which seeks to reform individuals. Dystopian visions of states which attempt to create people like machines, through 'social engineering' miss the point that contemporary governance inherits 'pastoral power' – which holds individual choice sacrosanct. Thus, no-one is 'reformed' from outside, but must participate in their own transformation; within liberal governmentality, 'freedom is something which is constantly produced' (Foucault, 2008: 65).

These seemingly abstract theories inform welfare institutions by providing explanatory schemes of how individual characters may be changed and redeemed by governmental interventions, such as ALMPs. Among these there are those which attempt to govern using incentives and the threat of sanctions

or 'sticks and carrots', which assume that individuals are calculating economic agents. This train of thought goes back through Charles Murray's insistence on economic self-responsibility to Jeremy Bentham's utilitarianism which insisted that all individuals follow their self-interest, and attempt to minimise pain and maximise pleasure (see chapter five). This 'economic' science has a narrow conception of human nature – treating people like donkeys by using sticks and carrots, and attempts to transform behaviour by 'making work pay' and making welfare ungenerous and dependent on labour market engagement

Tests and Trials

Transformation of subjects is at the heart of governmentality and pastoral power (Foucault, 1981); the attempt to redeem and reform individuals through subtle interventions, from exerting pressure through the processes of welfare claiming to discourses which incite and entice them to be good jobseekers. Detailed studies of the 'micro-physics of power' in welfare offices suggest that there are a myriad of different elements, from required meetings to monitored job-searches, to compulsory participation in training, one-to-one case officer meetings, psycho-metric assessment and so forth (Brodkin & Marsden, 2013). Simultaneously, welfare recipients are also engaged in the labour market – beyond the reach of the welfare office – but judged on their performance within it, assigned more training or coaching depending on their experiences. Thus, the broad mode of transforming individuals which emerges here is that individuals are tested, they are subjected to certain trials, put to the test until they succeed, and repeated failure only leads to further tests.

Tests are central to modernity in a number of ways: Most clearly, the market process of liberal economies 'tests' the value of goods and services, verifying their value in the form of price (Foucault, 2008). Such market tests are also used to scrutinise governmental action – interventions are only justified if they produce actual benefits in economy or society. Thus, welfare policies have testing built-in, they are designed to be accessible, even attempting to create scientific experiments, for instance, by randomised selection or ensuring a representative sample, and even creating a 'control-group', that is, a sample of the population to whom no intervention is made, thereby creating a base-line against which the effect of interventions is measured (Peck & Theodore, 2016). Indeed, Boltanski (2011) argues that modern institutions, particularly education and employment continuously test and assess individuals, so that the task of sociology is 'to describe the social world *as the scene of a trial'* (Boltanski, 2011: 25 – italics in original). Notably, this phenomenon predominates in modernity, not that 'traditional' society was a static world of unchanging custom and uncontested status, but modernity has made life itself into a trial.

This is a distinctly religious interpretation of life: 'every Christian will be called upon to regard life as nothing but a test' (Foucault, 2005: 446). An individual career is interpreted as a test or a trial, wherein suffering and difficulty serves to purify the self and allow them to learn about themselves. Without challenges, supposedly, no-one can know the truth of their character. Equally, society learns about itself by undergoing crises and challenges, it becomes stronger by responding, learning about itself and transforming itself.

My Christian brothers, you should be happy when you have all kinds of tests. You know these prove your faith. It helps you not to give up...The man who does not give up when tests come is happy. (James 1.2, 12)

Thus, adversity and challenges are to be welcomed as edifying, to be endured faithfully. Here, to 'prove your faith' both means to demonstrate belief but also to strengthen or refine, like iron proved in the furnace. Again, personal choice is central – the individual determination not to give up in the face of tests, and yet these 'tests' are also interpreted as 'God-sends', as is the strength to endure them; a paradoxical coupling of free-will and a providential order:

God keeps his promise and he will not allow you to be tested beyond your power to remain firm; at the time you are put to the test, he will give you the strength to endure it, and so provide you with a way out (1 Corinthians, 10: 12-13).

For the faithful, there is no test which cannot be endured, no suffering which cannot be rendered edifying, and moreover, these tests serve to reveal the true character of individuals. Now, everyone must endure something like the 'Trials of Job'.

Again, this is a cultural interpretation of life, or a discourse which produces the objects of which it speaks. Clearly, how suffering is interpreted is central to religious thought, as argued by Nietzsche's polemic against Christian sanctification of suffering, and in Weber's more nuanced exploration of 'world-religions' as specifically creating new interpretations of suffering. Beyond the broad brush-strokes of theology, each individual is directed to interpret their own suffering in specific ways: '...suffering is actually a test that is recognised lived and practiced as such by the subject.' (Foucault, 2005:443). For instance there are subtle differences between Roman stoics who took all apparent evil as a source of education to prepare the self for life through the exercise of rational self control, and Christians who take suffering as a test which proves their faith and purifies their sinful tendencies.

So what? All of this may seem like 'mere' culture, a set of strange beliefs about experiences and selfhood and society. However, beyond being an intellectual philosophy, these ideas are institutionalised, most especially in the institutions of the welfare office and ALMPs, and policy gestures such as the YG. State institutions, from schools to policy think-tanks presume that people are malleable, formed by their circumstances, but capable of making choices, which serve to transform them through pastoral power, with 'its zeal, devotion and endless application' (Foucault, 2007: 127). Our society is set up to 'test' people, from education to work-places and how they respond to and react to these 'trials' is supposed to reveal the 'true' character of the individual. In times of trouble, for instance, unemployment, individuals are not just supported, but subjected to further trials, where they must show their mettle, because transformation or redemption is neither automatic nor a foregone possibility – there are an infinite number of second chances. In effect, states take the place of providence, both in that they offer charitable assistance to the destitute, but more importantly in that they array a series of opportunities for choices and self-reformation for anyone and everyone. And increasingly, support is contingent on compliance with reformation and transformation.

What emerges here is not only the model of the individual as malleable clay, to be tested and transformed, but by extension, a version of government modelled on the divine – as Agamben suggests,

the welfare state takes on the role of providence, doing the work of the holy spirit (2011). Implicitly, the state must be involved in judging individuals, particularly the unemployed. Whereas the Epistle of James exhorts its readers 'Do not criticise one another.... Who are you to judge?' (4:11-12) – phrases which resonate today – the welfare state takes on this role, perhaps not quite a 'stigma machine' (Tyler, 2020), but at the very least a 'judgement machine'.

Contemporary processes of welfare activation exert secular adaptations of pastoral power upon the unemployed, firstly by requiring that they establish membership of society – the ecclesia – through a name, a birth-cert, a PPS number, but more importantly in an oath expressing their commitment to the work cult by swearing that they are lacking, available for and actively seeking work. Effectively, that they are willing to undergo tests, both that of the welfare office and the labour market. Beyond this, the unemployed must tell the truth about themselves, they must account for their lives and choices in interviews. These proceed on the assumption that the individual is responsible for their situation through their choices and behaviour, that these stem from their inner-characteristics, and that there is some form of personal deficiency – low-educational attainment, poor work ethic, pickiness or even criminal tendencies – or sloth, pride and avarice in religious terms. Individuals are encouraged to identify their weaknesses and flaws for the purposes of self-improvement and personal transformation, by reforming or even redeeming their character.

In effect, the state attempts to incarnate something akin to the 'City of God' in its welfare institutions, to 'immanentise the eschaton' in Voegelin's terms (1969). Endless tests and trials, help, advice and opportunities for self-transformation are offered. Rather than escape, there is no end to the work of reformation; even to the stubborn and recalcitrant or back-sliding, endless second chances are offered. Perhaps forgiveness is offered, but only at the price of penance and reformation. For the unemployed there are few alternatives to the model of life as a trial of self-transformation. Within this model, the state also deliberately administers suffering of various sorts, from pressure through scrutiny to threats to actually implementing welfare cuts, with the obvious impact of poverty, hunger, anxiety, and the possibility of debt, homelessness or suicide. These dangers are justified because suffering is implicitly the only route towards transformation; if the jobseeker fails the 'labour market test' by being unable to secure work in a competitive world, then welfare provides alternatives – career days, confidence training, work-readiness courses, all a series of trials oriented towards self-work, conversions from passive unemployment unto active jobseeking. These 'providential' offerings may be inadequate to actually create a job or genuinely build a CV, yet their purpose is to maintain the possibility that the individual can be redeemed.

Effectively, the truth of an individual, their worth and character are considered as revealed by tests and trials – occasions which offer the possibility of transformation, but also impose reform, demanding faith in the self and the labour market. And while these are only discourses, they effectively work, not necessarily to create jobs or transform people through training, but in imposing an interpretation of life in the labour market.