**Class on Foucault**

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**1. General Themes in Foucault**

- **Social construction of agency**: Much of the work we have discussed thus far begins from a conception of agents (individuals or states) with goals and a picture of those agents as rationally pursuing those goals. It is reasonable to wonder where these agents come from, how they are formed. In asking how they are formed, we want to know both why agents have the purposes they have (rather than some alternative purposes), but also how it comes about that individuals—whether persons or states—emerge as purposeful actors, who formulate goals and (more or less effectively) choose means for the achievement of those goals. Several answers to this question might be offered, including socialization into cultural norms of responsible conduct. Foucault's account emphasizes the role of power, in particular the disciplinary form of power, in making the individual, purposive agents who populate conventional theories. Such individuals are not given by nature, but formed by distinctive social practices which operate directly—and in the minutest details—on the bodies and activities of individuals. (Analogous to the idea, in IR, that circumstantial constraints impose unitary, rational agency on states.)

- **Hermeneutics of suspicion**: The emphasis on the role of power, especially disciplinary power, in forming individuals as agents is part of a more general view about the essential role of power in shaping the practices that we value in part because we think of them as infused with values rather than molded by power. In particular, knowledge-seeking in the human sciences and justice-seeking in law and politics are driven by power in ways that are not evident and that we do not acknowledge. So (i) knowledge in the human sciences (clinical medicine, child psychology, educational psychology) is founded on disciplinary power, and the surveillance, concerns about normality/standardization, and constant assessment associated with such power: more fundamentally, by the mix of objectives of producing docility/obedience and usefulness (both individual and collective); (ii) equality we associate with rule of law and democracy is founded on disciplinary practices (the "dark side") that mold the individuals who we represent as free and equal subjects: "the real, corporal disciplines constituted the foundation of the formal, juridical liberties" (222). The disciplines assure the submission needed for social order in a society of individuals who are formally free and equal: they provide "the cohesion of [the] social body" (Two Lectures, p. 106). More broadly, the historical processes that are commonly represented as relaxing constraints on individuals actually involve new forms of

constraint—new modalities/technologies of power—that may be less gruesome and violent, but more meticulously controlling.

- **Pervasiveness of Power:** more generally, social processes are pervasively power-ridden. To appreciate this ubiquity of power, we need to break from the picture of power as exercised by a central authority (association of power with sovereignty), or dominated by a single group (class). What is singular is not the agent who exercises power, but the technology of power—a way of deploying power—that is present in a dispersed set of social institutions and practices, even if its place in those practices is disguised and concealed by a focus on power as emanating principally from a sovereign authority, where the exercise of that central power can be legitimated through law and consent.

## 2. General Argument about Punishment

The argument about disciplinary power is part of a more specific and focused argument about the power to punish, and the emergence of a particular way to exercise that power.

Foucault distinguishes three ways of organizing the power to punish, which are associated with (1) monarchical law, which uses intense and discontinuous terror, to ceremonialize sovereign power through vengeance against the body of the criminal, who was an enemy of the sovereign, and whose torture affirmed the sovereign's power; (2) reforming jurists, who use signs or representations which announce detailed schedules of public sanctions associated with violations of law, and aim to reestablish the standing of individuals as equal subjects; for the reforming jurists, imprisonment is to be used only in exceptional cases (in response to crimes that limit the liberty of others), and a wide range of other sanctions (public works, fines, public shaming) used to instruct the public about the rules and provide incentives for compliance; and (3) prisons, in which a specialized administrative apparatus uses coercion to train the body and leaves traces in the habits of individuals. The question is: why do we see the rapid emergence of prisons—the "coercive, corporal, solitary, secretive model of the power to punish"—as the dominant form of punishment? Foucault's answer is that the emergence of the prison is one part of the emergence of a much broader range of disciplinary practices, in schools, hospitals, armies, and factories, all of which use the same polyvalent "technology of power." So understanding the emergence of prisons proceeds by understanding what a disciplinary society is, what is distinctive about the disciplinary mode of power, and what accounts for the widespread reliance on disciplinary power and thus for a disciplinary society.

So we have three questions: (1) what is a disciplinary society and what generically speaking is disciplinary power; (2) what are the main characteristics and methods of disciplinary power; (3) how and why does the disciplinary form of power emerge and spread throughout the social body?

In conjunction with the third question: we want to know how Foucault can explain the emergence of a disciplinary society without relying, in the explanation, on conceptions of individual agency that he suggests are only formed by the spread of disciplinary power itself.

3.  **What, generally speaking, is disciplinary society/disciplinary power?**

    a)  Discipline: (i) general formula for domination: techniques for ordering human multiplicities that can be used in different institutions: armies (modeled on Protestant armies), schools (modeled on Jesuit colleges), hospitals (modeled on military hospitals); (ii) characteristic of discipline: detailed/meticulous; focused on body/movement; organization of space, time, movement; (iii) objective of disciplines is, generically speaking, to get an ideal mix of docility and utility, of obedience and usefulness, in a multiplicity. Not simply trying to control, but to make maximally effective use as well, and in particular to make maximally effective not simply of individuals but of multiplicity. In this respect, different from slavery, service, vassalage, and monasticism; (iv) more particularly, they have the triple objective of minimizing costs, both economic and political (low resistance, low visibility); maximizing intensive effects (no gaps or intervals in exercise of power); maximizing output of apparatus (education, production, military force, health).

    b)  A *disciplinary society* is a society in which there is widespread reliance on disciplinary institutions—i.e. institutions in which the disciplinary technology of power is deployed—and in which disciplinary power is implicated with non-disciplinary forms of power (216). Society in which disciplines are no longer used simply as a method for quarantining dangerous populations, but spread through the whole social body: happens in the 18th century.

So what we want to know is how and why it happens that methods of ordering groups of people that aim at an optimal mix of docility and usefulness come to predominate.

4.  **What are specific characteristics and means used by disciplinary power?**

a) Four aspects of the individuality formed by disciplinary power:

> (i)    **Cellular**: control of *space* and assignment of people to locations (using tables) that serve both to control opposition (in part by

surveillance, in part by separation) and to generate maximal product. The complex task of spatial aspect of discipline is that you can't simply isolate people from one another, at work or in army (that may work for some kinds of manufacturing, with piece work, but not for tasks that require coordination). Need to have controlled collaboration.

(ii) **Organic**: use of *maneuvers* to train the body so that its capacities are maximized, and no energy is wasted. Train the *activities* of body down to particular gestures; train the whole body itself so that these particular gestures are made with greatest effectiveness and speed (as in teaching handwriting, including instructions in posture and positioning of all parts of body); and ensure that the gestures and overall training of the body fits the body to the tools it uses (weapons, machines).

(iii) **Genetic**: organization of *time*, so that individuals pass through a series of *exercises* of increasing complexity, while aiming to make them maximally usable at the end (as in teaching or in military training).

(iv) **Combinatory**: not simply a division of tasks, but uses tactics to get a composition of forces that is greater than the sum of the parts. Individuals are formed in ways that make them fit together, and so that their joint action is triggered by relatively simple directives (commands issues by officers, or teachers). "Discipline is no longer simply an art of distributing bodies [cellular], of extracting time from them [organic] and accumulating it [genetic], but of composing forces in order to obtain an efficient machine" (164).

b) Three means used by disciplinary power:

(i) observation (surveillance)

(ii) normalizing judgment: use of common set of standards to which all are to conform, and by reference to which all are graded and judged.

(iii) examination

5. **How and why do we get disciplines spreading?**

a) How: (i) *functional inversion*: shift in the role of discipline from increasing control to increasing capacity; from capturing deserters to coordinating

and constructing more effective military power; from preventing theft of materials in the factory to increasing labor productivity; from confining disorderly children to training them for useful activity; (ii) *swarming* (spilling out): extension of surveillance and control to surrounding populations (schools to parents and neighbors; hospitals to surrounding populations); mobile disciplinary organizations (charitable group with geographic responsibility); (iii) state involvement in disciplines through the police, who control local disorders in response to initiatives from below.

b) Why? (i) the triple objective (reduced cost, increased control, increased output) "corresponds to" large demographic thrust with associated growth in floating population and scale of groups (in schools, military); and growth in scale and complexity and cost of productive apparatus (economic, educational, military, medical); (ii) need to "adjust their correlation," which seems to mean a need to develop new arrangements that can restore order (profitability?) under these changed conditions; (iii) existing forms of power (monarchy, feudal hierarchy, local mechanisms) are too costly (to Treasury, to the population, in promoting resistance, and in relying on extraction); (iv) disciplines enter in as ways to order the multiplicity of men and new productive apparatuses: reduce inefficiency, master resistance, increase capacity of each element, promote coordination.

So, disciplines emerge as ways to control and make productive use of large numbers and large institutions, while reduces the costs of the apparatus needed to exercise that control: "discipline is the unitary technique by which the body is reduced as a 'political' force at the least cost and maximized as a useful force" (221). The disciplines are "the ensemble of minute technical inventions that made it possible to increase the useful size of multiplicities by decreasing the inconveniences of the power which, in order to make them useful, must control them" (220).

c) What sort of explanation do we have, then, of the emergence and spread of disciplines, and the formation of a disciplinary society? Not an explanation that focuses on agents acting on their interests or ideas, but a functional explanation: that is, we have an account of the emergence of a new modality of power by reference, roughly, to the fact that its emergence has effects of a certain kind. And the effects seem to be not simply a matter of survival, but a matter of optimizing: least cost methods of generating maximal outputs (or even reduced cost methods of generating increased outputs). Now this kind of explanation fits with Foucault's concern to tell the story about the emergence of disciplinary society without relying on an account of individual agents. But why would the fact (assuming it is a fact) that disciplinary power/society has effects of the kind indicated lead account for its emergence. There are two standard ways to fill out functional explanations: Darwinian and purposive.

i) The Darwinian elaboration explains the presence of a condition by reference to the contribution of that condition to the fitness of an organism, and then observes that it is hardly surprising that we observe organisms to have fitness-enhancing conditions, because in a competitive environment, only the organisms with the fitness-enhancing conditions survive. The problem with the natural selection story, for the social case, is that the competitive mechanism is not so obviously in force: thus we do not see systems dying off.

ii) The purposive elaboration says that we get changes with the desirable effects because agents can see that the changes are needed to achieve some desired state and those agents have the capacity to enforce the necessary changes. Now this might be the right story, but it is not one that Foucault can happily accept, because it supposes that we have already-constituted agents whose aims and capacities account for the change.