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**Rationale**

Another book on Foucault? Michel Foucault (1926-84) is one of the most internationally influential French scholars of the post-World War II period. Known primarily for his work on the mutually enabling relationship between knowledge and power and their use for social control, Foucault has been so influential in the English-speaking humanities and social sciences that it is barely possible to consider yourself a serious student in these fields without a working understanding of his writing, concepts and terminology. Whether contemporary writers strongly agree or disagree with Foucault, or fall somewhere in between, nearly all respond to his widespread influence, even if many are, at times, themselves unaware of their dependence on it. Consequently, the number of books and articles that try to explain, use, or extend Foucault is very long indeed. Why then, is there any need, at this late date, for a reader’s guide to Foucault and one of his most-cited works, *Discipline and Punish: Birth of the Prison* (1975, English translation 1977)?

The *How to Read Theory* series has as its overall motive to fill a gap for new readers of theoretical classics who have been disserved over recent years. As “theory” has become more commonly used in the humanities and social sciences, students have been increasingly taught these writings through selected key passages of larger works, usually in specially designed anthologies. This strategy, however, denies those new to theory the chance to read critical arguments in their full context. Anthology readers lose the chance to see the process by which an argument is built up or how they might even respond to somewhat prefabricated snippets. If those hostile to the presence of theory often complain that many writers use certain theoretical words and phrases as if they were magic incantations that could simply be sprinkled, with mesmeric spirit, over an essay as if they were self-evident truths, the anthology approach is partially to blame, no matter how well-intentioned its editors.

*How to Read Theory*, on the other hand, believes that unfamiliar readers are best educated when they are helped to understand the whole trajectory of an important work by exploring its overall careful construction. Without this complete horizon, readers risk isolating bits of an argument and then misunderstanding what a much-studied writer is trying to say.

Nowhere is this error of incompleteness more common than with Foucault in general and in particular, *Discipline and Punish*, one of his most significant works. Precisely because *Discipline and Punish* has been so cited, a great deal of writing on it is unhelpful, since the English-speaking readers who have frequently relied on secondary explanations and anthologies, do not realize the limits and errors these create. We feel that readers who want to benefit fully from Foucault’s insights need to go back and read *Discipline and Punish* as a whole, paying attention to its actual claims and structure of argument, rather than the
imaginary ones claimed for it. In particular existing summaries of *Discipline and Punish* have been especially marred by three key absences, which we hope here to repair.

The first of these gaps is that abbreviated versions of *Discipline and Punish* lose sight that *Discipline and Punish* is above all a work of history emerging out of a particular French intellectual context. The book examines the strategy and tactics in punishment’s changing forms from the late seventeenth and early eighteenth century to the mid-nineteenth (and beyond). Yet when Foucault published his work, there was still a large difference, if not mutual hostility, between the kinds of historical writing that were dominant in English-speaking lands and the ones by French scholars, who were challenging the themes and methods that Anglophone historians favoured. One feature of this split was the French scholars’ move away from defining history by great (usually) men and towards the study of a social history of anonymous or non-heroic figures, those often overlooked from academic perspectives, namely the working class and the poor, women, rural labourers, “deviants” and criminals (these being overlapping categories). Another feature of the French historians was a declining commitment to relying on specific monumental dates, like those of battles, and towards longer periods of time, by taking several decades, or even centuries, as a single unit or by choosing dates that are not immediately dependent on the actions of a small group of elite historical figures. Even when Anglophone left and labour historians did begin to produce histories of the disempowered, they still tended to highlight “events” rather than longer time-spans.

Because Foucault’s work falls generally within these French interests, his work was largely introduced into the United States and the United Kingdom by literature, rather than history, professors. While the former were more accepting of Foucault’s concerns, they were, conversely, often less interested in the historical phases that Foucault described and what helped create these changes. They focused instead mainly on the most recent historical phase that might be useful as a way to interpret modern literary and cultural affairs. By ignoring the several shifts between periods of time that Foucault describes, literary and cultural studies scholars lost sense of his claim about how modes of punishment make sense only in context of their own moment’s dominant features and tensions. Yet if we are not attentive to Foucault’s descriptions of ways in which Western societies developed into their modern forms, then we both lose sight of the present as a moment in an ongoing process and Foucault’s, admittedly often implicit, suggestions for how we might move beyond or escape this present. Furthermore, if readers only examine parts of *Discipline and Punish*, then they can easily experience Foucault’s vision as grim and lacking in change. Nothing could be further from the book’s message. Yet to uncover Foucault’s dedication to the possibility of a post-disciplinary society, we must pay close attention to his tale of passages through different historical moments to see what Foucault highlights as integral to the making of social change.

In one sense, *Discipline and Punish* appears easy to read. Large parts of the book are written with great style and draw on graphic, immediately understandable examples. Furthermore, the book is organized into chapters and sections that make it easy to outline, especially as Foucault often numbers the points he wants to make. Additionally, Foucault is usually very careful to use his terminology in a precise and consistent fashion to differentiate the concepts he wants to illustrate. In another sense, though, Foucault can be an elusive writer to comprehend. This difficulty arises because Foucault was very much a member of the post-war French intellectual milieu. In the hothouse of universities located in and around Paris, academics were usually quite familiar with each other’s positions within a set of well-known theoretical debates. Because of this (at times suffocating) proximity, they were able to develop a writing style that signalled their own position with a few casual words.

For readers who are less familiar with this French academic environment and its questions, it is very easy to overlook what might seem to be a marginal comment, but is, in fact, the key to decoding a particular passage. For instance, while many would expect that any social history of France throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries would draw heavily on the Revolution’s effects in the 1790s, Foucault, for reasons partly explained below, rarely draws his readers’ attention to it. This is partly because Foucault assumes that his reader is French and therefore very familiar with their own political history, especially the
period surrounding the French Revolution and modern nationhood. Many contemporary
English-language readers of Foucault are simply not as well versed with these events and
their representative figures. When this absence is combined with Foucault’s light touch
allusions to other academic arguments, large and important aspects of *Discipline and Punish*
seem vague, marginal and skippable. Conversely, one reason why the segment on English
political scientist Jeremy Bentham’s plan for a new model prison, the Panopticon, is so
commonly anthologized may be that it is a section that unusually deals with English-language
material from an author whose name is already recognizable and has accompanying
illustrations that make Foucault’s point very clear. Yet the Panopticon section might arguably
have been removed entirely from the book, since this part mainly repeats points that Foucault
has already made previously in the text. However, because English readers do not follow the
historical tale that Foucault constructs or know the story of the French Revolution, they tend
to lean on the Panopticon section in ways that create idiosyncratic explanations based on a
limited perspective of *Discipline and Punish*.

Foucault might not have spoken more explicitly about the Revolution for reasons
involving the second absence in most Anglophone discussions: Foucault’s relationship with
Marx. For most of the twentieth century, Marxism was one of the main intellectual currents
for European writers. Whether authors considered themselves on the right or the left, nearly
every one wrote with an awareness of Marx’s writing on political economy. Additionally, the
Communist Party was a mass political party in post-war France and Italy. For English-
speakers, the ubiquity of academic conversation about Marx and the wide-spread influence of
the Stalinist-oriented French Communist Party (PCF) for much of the twentieth century’s
intellectual affairs is hard to grasp, given the historically marginal place the Communist Party
has had in the UK and the US, as well as the fashion in recent decades to be anti-marxist.
Writing after the 1960s, when the French Communist Party was condemned for being a
retarding force on worker and student resistance, Foucault (himself briefly a Communist party
member in the 1950s) often strives to distance himself from the PCF’s official party line and
associated theoretical concepts. By rarely mentioning the French Revolution, which had
become a litmus test regarding one’s allegiance to PCF dictates, Foucault indicates his desire
to put distance between the party and himself. Since the French Revolution was read by the
official left as allegorically foreshadowing the Russian one in 1918, and, in turn, the Cold
War conflict between Western state-officiated capitalism and Eastern state-officiated
sovietism, any mention of the 1790s was fraught. So if Foucault does not devote much time to
the Revolution, it is because he wishes to avoid being seen as embroiled within the skirmishes
surrounding party affiliation. And, as we will see, Foucault believes that state party politics
obscure the ways in which modern power relations and class stratification operate.

Yet to move away from the official communist party is not the same as rejecting
Marx’s writings and insights. Marx is one of the most favourably cited authorities in
*Discipline and Punish*, and Foucault implicitly and explicitly draws on Marx’s arguments in
*Capital* to help explain the logic for historical change. Foucault always introduces Marx as
supporting evidence and never as a figure to be disproved. As Foucault makes clear (221),
capitalism could not exist without the form of control that Foucault calls “discipline” and
discipline could not succeed without the rise of capitalism. In many ways, one of *Discipline
and Punish*’s main projects in its treatment of class-struggle, power and knowledge is to
provide a way for new students of Marx to escape the PCF’s increasingly unfruitful use of the
terms “ideology” and “false consciousness” as explanations for why the working class
submits to middle-class authority.

Still because so many Anglophone critics who used theory from the 1970s onward
either explicitly positioned themselves as anti-marxist or were, more commonly, simply
unfamiliar with Marx’s work, they promoted readings of Foucault that denied or downplayed
Foucault’s agreements with Marx. Similarly, many unashamed marxists mistook the
assertions of Foucault’s acolytes for Foucault’s own arguments, and they, too, (wrongly)
insist that Foucault is unsympathetic to materialist claims. We feel that any basic reading of
*Discipline and Punish* makes it impossible to claim any of the above. Therefore, our second
justification for this book is the need to scrape away the crust of prejudice that has
accumulated around *Discipline and Punish* in order to see afresh what it is actually arguing. As Foucault repeatedly asks us to do, we need to restore our reading of *Discipline and Punish* alongside Marx’s critique of capitalism.

At its heart, *Discipline and Punish* is a stunning dismantling of the cherished bourgeois ideal of the individual and the political, economic and cultural valences of that concept. Liberal politics enshrines the rights of the individual at the heart of most of its constitutional and legal theories and actively seeks to make collective groupings, like class or ethnicity, invisible and unremarkable. The liberal notion of intrinsic basic freedoms depends on the assumption that it is the individual’s speech and beliefs that must be protected against society. The individual also lies at the heart of liberal economic theory, which highlights the moment of the contract, the buying and selling between two consenting parties, as the most fair and equal way of conducting business exchanges. Culturally, the private individual is celebrated as the hallmark of Enlightenment rationality, humanist sensibility, the Romantic cult of artistic genius and the container of authentic, emotional and behavioural identities.

Along with a longstanding leftist and marxist tradition, Foucault uses *Discipline and Punish* to argue that the cultivation of the individual in these terms camouflages the middle class’s desire to become the dominant group within a capitalist economy. The scene of the contract obscures actual power inequalities, Enlightenment reason is linked to coercive force, and the humanist mythos of the authentic personality of the individual has been historically constructed as a device to control threatening collectives, namely those of the working and lower classes. Yet as Foucault casts suspicion on the humanist rhetoric of individual freedom, he challenges basic mainstream assumptions about using personal identity as a tool for liberation.

Here we find a third absence in many readings of Foucault. Because Foucault focuses on dominant social structures, it is easy to believe that he presents a totalizing vision, a picture of a closed box with no way out. This pessimistic reading can only come about from de-historicized and de-contextualized readings of Foucault’s work. Foucault, however, repeatedly argues that each historical phase can and does decline, usually from its inability to control popular resistance from the lower and labouring classes. If discipline remains effective today, this is only because it has not fully been challenged, and it remains so effective as it works in ways almost unseen in our daily lives. Yet Foucault’s ultimate motivation is to clarify how discipline operates so that it can be challenged. He is more forthright about this process, however, in his interviews, rather than in *Discipline and Punish* itself.

Nowhere does Foucault present a monolithic version of society or suggest that left political activism is pointless. Foucault wrote *Discipline and Punish* alongside his own membership in GIP (*Le Groupe d’Information sur les Prisons*/Group for Information on Prisons), which sought to provide a public medium for French prisoners’ complaints at a time when prisoners’ riots for rights were making the news. Elsewhere in his writing, Foucault talks about the need for academic researchers to recover the voices of the historically disempowered to help better contemporary conditions. *Discipline and Punish* belongs to this vision. When Foucault says that he is writing “the history of the present” (31), he invites his contemporary readers to use the lessons of his history, not simply learn them by heart.

These three elements of (revolutionary) history, marxism and activism are often muted in accounts of Foucault, yet without them, no intelligible or satisfying reading of *Discipline and Punish* can emerge. Our goal here is to be “new” only by maintaining fidelity to Foucault’s actual text.

**Overview**

In *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault presents a history of the changes in criminal codes and punishments to explore why Western society moved from a bodily punishment of torture to a “gentle” punishment of prison sentences. He argues that we did not stop torturing people because we became more enlightened, humanitarian and respectful of individual rights.
Instead, he claims that the codes of “justice” always represent and materially enact social power. The difference between early modern society and a modern one is not that modern society is more civilized; it is just that punishment before the late eighteenth century had a logic that expressed the dominant interests of society wherein the King was meant to have absolute power. Punishment in modern society is enacted differently because modern society is bourgeois; it is controlled by the middle class, and the middle class has different social agendas than the monarchy.

Foucault focuses on a history of punishment, therefore, to illustrate the larger social transfer and transformation of power from the aristocracy to the middle classes. By learning the changes in the mode of punishment over time, we can see how since the late eighteenth/early nineteenth century, the bourgeoisie have maintained authority by creating modern forms of subjectivity through a dual process: making an individual a non-threatening, subordinated political “subject” while simultaneously installing a new kind of personhood or identity. This form of power mainly works by producing knowledge, a defining “truth” about individuals’ behaviour and personality, only in order to discipline them through social definitions of normality, material institutions (like schools, hospitals and prison reformatories) and the supervising judgment of professionals (doctors, teachers, judges, etc.).

The story Foucault tells is the move from excessive public, physical punishments to private, invisible discipline of our psychological sense of selfhood, as a middle-class tactic to control forms of popular (mass) socialization and alternative political and economic outlooks.

By challenging the notion that the “self” is a space of human freedom and guarantee of rights, Foucault seeks to dismantle cherished notions about political and economic liberalism, which highlight individual choice and liberty; the Enlightenment, as a movement that believes that knowledge can be objective and detached from power relations, if not actively in opposition to social inequality; and all forms of psychological claims that believe we have an authentic interior personality that is an aesthetic sanctuary from the public realm of politics and the marketplace.

Discipline and Punish, then, uses penal history to incriminate a host of Enlightenment and Romantic-era claims about society and the self. Rather than seeing the personal as a tool of liberation, Foucault sees it as a trap that has been set in advance for us by middle-class interests. As such, Foucault seems to be offering a critique from within the left about the ways in which the cultural politics of the 1960s onward have been organized along the lines of (ethnic, racial, sexual, gender, environmental, etc.) identity politics and claims for self-expression. In critiquing the self’s desires as socially conditioned and contaminated by social divisions and economic inequality, Foucault also offers a line of critical enquiry on all forms of humanities and social science scholarship that often take these new kinds of identities as their focus. This approach became especially evident in literary studies, where the idea of individual genius and the heroic reader’s private pleasure had been a dominant theme for some time, a move that Foucault specifically mentions in Discipline and Punish.

What if novels, for instance, are themselves mediums for transmitting unfair power relations as they help audiences to fashion their imagination about the self?

In Discipline and Punish, Foucault reveals knowledge, power and subjectivity as a scheme that often operates below our radar, since its procedures usually seem trivial and not worth protesting. In How to Read Foucault’s Discipline and Punish, we seek to enable the reader’s efforts in their first encounter with this challenging and exciting book. To help orient you, we follow Discipline and Punish’s chapter and section structure and often quote Foucault’s own words so that they will seem less strange or incomprehensible when you next read them. We try to be comprehensive in our account, but no guide can ever be complete. Foucault is too complex a thinker and the riches of Discipline and Punish can only be found through multiple readings. Ideally this book will help provide the platform for these future encounters, assisting you with the first steps by pointing out the book’s general architecture and significance of its passages. With this awareness, you should be more comfortable and confident in reading (and using) Discipline and Punish and Foucault’s other writings as well. In short, this guide should be a starting point, not a conclusion.
Note on Text
Foucault originally published Surveiller et Punir: Naissance de la Prison in 1975 with Éditions Gallimard. The first and only English translation, by Alan Sheridan, appeared in 1977 with Allen Lane. While this translation has since appeared under different imprints (UK readers will usually find it as a Penguin, while it is Vintage for US ones), the plates and pagination remain the same for all. Any Anglophone reader can thus easily locate the pages indicated in our parenthetical references.

There are two main formal differences between the French original and the English translation. More illustrative plates are included in the former, mostly of different images of prisons. Also, Sheridan turned some of the non-descriptive footnote citations into embedded parenthetical references. We believe that Sheridan’s change makes for a more fluid reading experience. In his translator’s note, Sheridan comments on the work’s title, which literally would be To Survey and Punish. After Foucault, we might find the word “surveillance” easier to understand and more rich in implications, but in the 1970s, Sheridan found it “too restricted and technical”. He claims that Foucault himself suggested the English title as the best compromise. Lastly, when Foucault talks about abstract individuals, he only uses the masculine pronoun. Contemporary readers may see this as either simply a convention of Foucault’s time or dogged inability to recognize the implication of gender. In any case, we will below typically use “he or she” and so on.

In memory of Sally Ledger (1961-2009) and Melvin Shapiro (1927-2009).

Part Three: Discipline

The third part is the one that is most commonly assigned to students and that occasional or second-hand readers of Discipline and Punish are familiar with. It is the source for many of Foucault’s most quoted terms and phrases. While it is the section that you may find yourself returning to re-read often, it is advisable to do so only with careful attention to the Parts before and after it. Part Four is especially important, since it is there that Foucault explains the purpose of most of the techniques he describes in Part Three.

1. Docile bodies

Foucault begins this section by describing the definition and evolution of the modern, disciplined body within an increasingly quasi-militaristic society. He starts by contrasting two ideals of the soldier in different historical periods. In the early seventeenth century, under the Ancien Régime, an excellent soldier was one who could display his superior, martial physique as an immobile object. By the “classical age”, the name Foucault uses for the eighteenth-century period of the Enlightenment (classical in its rediscovery of “Greek” and “Roman” history and culture, when the middle classes began to recirculate tales about the Roman Republic as examples of alternative legal and political structures to the absolutist monarchy), the individual body was discovered as “object and target of power” (136), a body that can be made more skillful and more effective. This technically mutable body was considered more important than one of unprefabricated “natural” strength and good “blood”. Just as the early phase of the Industrial Revolution was discovering new production processes and technologies, there was a complementary notion that the human individual (and society) could be reconstructed to be better and more efficient. The heroic ideal of untouched nature became replaced with one of technical betterment.

Returning to the example of de La Mettrie’s Man-the-Machine [L’Homme-machine] as a touchstone, Foucault argues that the discovery of the body as an object that can be “manipulated, shaped, trained, [and] which obeys, responds, becomes skilful and increases its
forces” (136)—a manufactured body—works through two registers: the “anatomico-
metaphysical register”, which seeks to detail the body’s functions, and the “technico-political
register”, which uses calculations and quantifications, mainly gathered from armies, schools
and hospitals, to make bodies submissive and controllable. These two registers of the body as
object of study—“analysable body”—on the one hand and the “manipulable body” on the
other hand combine to form the project of “docility”. “A body is docile that may be subjected,
used, transformed and improved” (136). This is a two-stage process. The body must first be
made submissive and docile before it can be “subjected, used, transformed and improved”.

Foucault argues that these “projects of docility” were new in the scale, object and
mode of their control. Firstly, instead of trying to make large groups, or populations,
submissive, as a conquering nation might with a colonized one, “docility” works on the
smaller scale of individuals. Secondly, the object of concern is not the body’s messages or
representations, but its forces and dynamics. The body is not meant to “signify”, as it was in
the age of punishment, but to be “economic”; it must be made efficient and trained through
exercise. Finally, “docility” creates a mode of total supervision, where the individual faces an
“uninterrupted, constant coercion” through the new use of “time, space, movement”, which
are segmented into smaller units, and “the processes of the activity” are even more important
than “its result” (137).

These three methods (focus on the individual; making it productive, supervising its
duration, location and trajectory) combine to form what Foucault calls “disciplines”. The term
“discipline” implies both the controlling or disciplining of a person and a “discipline” as an
academic specialty (a knowledge of each body, of bodies, will be produced). “Discipline” is
the name that Foucault gives to the combination of the practical and theoretical attempts to
make the body both docile and more useful (increase its utility).

docility + utility = discipline

While aspects of these disciplinary methods have already long existed, they cross a threshold
as they converge in a new and distinctive way “in the course of the seventeenth and
eighteenth centuries” when “the disciplines became general formulas of domination” (137).
Modern discipline is different from older models in the ways it controls bodies. Discipline is
not like the traditional form of slavery because the latter takes violent command of the whole
body: discipline works more subtly, it does not appropriate the entire body (as would torture)
and consequently does not require as much muscular force as a slave-owner must dispense.
Discipline differs from a servant’s relationship to the master, since, as we will see, discipline
does not have a central, king-like, voice of authority; discipline is more decentralized, diffuse
and universal. Discipline differs from feudal serfdom because it does not seek the spectacular
“ritual marks of allegiance” (137) to the lord. Finally, discipline cannot be compared to
monastic asceticism, which seeks to “obtain renunciations rather than increases of utility”
(137); the monastery wants the individual to give up their bodies and abstain from its use,
while discipline wants individuals to make their bodies more productive.

Discipline seeks a new “art of the human body” (137) that creates a relationship
where obedience and productivity are mutually constituting. “Discipline increases the forces
of the body (in economic terms of utility) and diminishes these same forces (in political terms
of obedience)” (138). The body is not only made to do more, but the process of gaining useful
labour is made easier to control as well.

From here, Foucault increasingly telegraphs his argument that there is a fundamental
relationship between capitalism and discipline as he insists that discipline is a key, albeit
previously under-recognized, aspect of the rise of capitalism. “Disciplinary coercion” is what
enables the “economic exploitation [that] separates the force and the product of labour” (138)
from the proletarian for the capitalist’s profit. For Marx, profit comes from altering the mode
of production to produce a new surplus-value through the exploitation of labourers. For
Foucault, discipline is the social and political mechanism that facilitates the economic control
on which a bourgeois society rests, since discipline provides the techniques for controlling
labourers (docility) in ways that increase their profit-making productivity (utility). An older
form of marxist criticism would see the political as simply mirroring the economic. Foucault suggests that the two are inextricably intertwined and mutually affirming, rather than one being dependent on the other. “If economic exploitation separates the force and the product of labour, let us say that disciplinary coercion establishes in the body the constricting link between an increased aptitude and an increased domination” (138). Rather than substituting marxist analysis, Foucault arguably builds on and refines it to illustrate how exactly capitalism holds individuals in its grip.

Discipline is not a centralized system of control; it is diffuse and discrete:

The ‘invention’ of this new political anatomy must not be seen as a sudden discovery. It is rather a multiplicity of often minor processes, of different origin and scattered location, which overlap, repeat, or imitate one another, support one another, distinguish themselves from one another according to their domain of application, converge and gradually produce the blueprint of a general method. (138)

These aspects are first seen in secondary education, then primary education, then hospitals and finally the military. The tempo of circulation in aspects of discipline between these different institutional sites is always different, sometimes fast, sometimes slow. But “[n]ot almost every occasion they were adopted in response to particular needs: an industrial innovation, a renewed outbreak of certain epidemic diseases, the invention of the rifle or the victories of Prussia” (138).

The key implication in this claim that modern power works through a decentralized network is that Foucault suggests that there is not just one force, like the State, that can be overthrown to liberate people. Instead, we are held in place by a capillary network of multiple small nodes, each of which contributes to our subordination, but which can also be compensated for if one fails or is dismantled. The battlegrounds for Foucault are more numerous than traditional political science has considered.

Commenting on his method and the scope of this study, Foucault says that he does not intend to write “the history of the different disciplinary institutions”; instead, he wishes “to map on a series of examples some of the essential techniques that most easily spread from one to another” (139). His examples, he reveals in a footnote on page 141, are drawn from “military, medical, educational and industrial institutions” (314). As Foucault notes, “[o]ther examples might have been taken from colonization, slavery and child rearing” (314). This note and its implications have caused a fair amount of debate, since it can be read as suggesting that the histories of the empire and gender are simply redundant and that race and gender do not have specific aspects that need treating. While this may not be what Foucault meant to say, this rather cursory footnote is admittedly less than helpful.

Rather than writing minute descriptions of different institutional histories, then, Foucault concentrates on what he believes is a general tendency within each of them: a “new micro-physics” (139) of control that spreads out throughout society in small, often unnoticed ways. He will mainly focus on the prison as his representative model (for the others).

Returning to analyze the distinctive qualities of discipline, Foucault insists that discipline is an unusual form of power that is often difficult to discern. The agents of discipline are preoccupied with minor, seemingly inconsequential things because they realize that power can be managed more efficiently and with less resistance through rules over small things. “Discipline is a political anatomy of detail” (139). Foucault acknowledges that aspects of the “utilitarian rationalization of detail in moral accountability and political control” (139) have existed historically before in “theology and asceticism” (140), but he thinks that what is new here is the secular importance given to making details productive. The figure that he chooses to characterize this is the new state figure of control, Napoleon Bonaparte. Foucault invokes Napoleon here because the General represents the militarizing French society through the rise of the Empire: “Napoleon did not discover this world; but we know that he set out to organize it; and he wished to arrange around him a mechanism of power that would enable him to see the smallest event that occurred in the state he governed” (141).
Before moving on to Foucault’s summary of discipline, it is also worth pausing to recognize that Foucault often refers back to Church theology to show the initial appearance, but not functional lineage, of modern discipline. He does this partly because France is, of course, a Catholic dominated country, and so any historian of France is going to end up looking at Church archives. But this gesture also counters a familiar argument in historical sociology, one most clearly made by Max Weber (1864-1920) in *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, which sees Protestantism as providing the key aspect to the rise of capitalism. *Discipline and Punish* can be read as rejecting this narrowly denominational explanation. To downplay the importance of Protestantism, Foucault uses many examples from Catholic writers and institutions to show alternative pathways. The larger point is that Foucault sees the origin of discipline as emerging from the rise of secular institutions and does not see religious cultures as being the leading force for changes.

Foucault now describes the four different aspects of discipline involving the control, classification and regulation of space, time, human development and its dynamics. The first is the art of distributions involving the organization and fixing of “individuals in space” (141). There are several techniques herein. Firstly, individuals must be enclosed, contained within nonpermeable spaces, like barracks, schools and factories. These spaces will literally be walled in to prevent or supervise the movement of individuals in and out of defined areas. The model is the monastic cell, separated from public view. The aim is to control space to prevent rebellion, to hold the vagabond mass in place, to master the placement of the labour force and fix it to desirable places.

Secondly, these closed off spaces will be partitioned in smaller and smaller units. The purpose of making a divided, exclusive space is to prevent those who should be ruled from gathering in groups whose movement cannot be ascertained or controlled. It was a “tactic of anti-desertion, anti-vagabondage, anti-concentration” (143). The traffic and gatherings of the lower classes are to be broken up and people placed in ways that makes it easy to know where they are and what they are doing at any time. Partitioning makes for an “analytical space” that allows for better supervision than poorly defined spaces of social exchanges, like ports. In no case, should the lower classes be allowed to have meeting-places where they might dangerously circulate political ideas and stolen or pilfered goods.

Thirdly, spaces are also to be “functional sites” (143) that not only allow people to be more easily supervised individually, but also to make them become more economically “useful” (144) in these spaces. Space is considered as “therapeutic” in the sense of positioning individuals in ways that they can function “better”, that is to say more efficiently than before (144). The model here is the industrial division of labour where one part of the factory is responsible for only one aspect of a commodity’s production. The liberal economist Adam Smith (1723-1790) celebrated this division of labour as increasing workers’ efficiency and Marx saw it as a defining aspect of the capitalist transformation in the late eighteenth/nineteenth century. Foucault similarly sees the “emergence of large-scale industry” as dependent on the “division of the production process, the individualizing fragmentation of labour power” (145) through spatial divisions. Functional space is made legible by charting it out on a two-dimensional table or grid graph.

Finally, space must have a rank (145); it must be divided into interchangeable units, and ones that are always organized in a hierarchical sequence. An individual’s value is determined by where they are located within “serial space” (147) as a means of encouraging them to do more. Foucault’s example here is the classroom that is divided into seats where supposedly smarter or more worthy students are placed in relation to others who perform less well.

Foucault illustrates this point with the example of a Jesuit school that uses classical Roman names to describe its competition-inducing ranks, and he says that “[o]ne should not forget, that generally speaking, the Roman model, at the Enlightenment, played a dual role: in its republican aspect, it was the embodiment of liberty; in its military aspect, it was the ideal schema of discipline” (146). This phrase goes to the heart of Foucault’s critique about the contradictions inherent in the anti-aristocratic, republican Enlightenment. The middle classes that promoted the Enlightenment and the French Revolution sought to legitimize themselves
by way of historical examples from the Roman Republic, but Foucault reminds us that this was a republic that also became a military empire. Once more, Foucault wants to show that “reason” (knowledge) is always tied to “force” (power).

Foucault suggests that this two-fold model made for the inevitability of Napoleon as Emperor coming out of the French Revolution. Aside from criticizing the latent force within bourgeois slogans of equality, Foucault also seems to be making a coded comment about the repressiveness of Stalin as emerging from the Russian Revolution, in other words, the failure of the Russian Revolution to question bourgeois justice and other kinds of institutions alongside the overthrowing of a capitalist economy. This implicit critique works to reflect back on the French Communist Party (PCF) which was/is very Stalinist and was blamed for not supporting the student movement in “May 1968”. In a larger sense, Foucault seems to telegraph his interest in looking back at why the recent social movements of the 1960s were not able to succeed, and he does this by looking at the history of other failed revolutions, like that of the 1790s.

Summarizing the division of space, Foucault says that, “the disciplines create complex spaces that are at once architectural, functional and hierarchical” (148). Distribution makes:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>cells</th>
<th>architectural space</th>
<th>fixes positions and prevents circulation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>places</td>
<td>functional space</td>
<td>marks places with an indicative value</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ranks</td>
<td>hierarchical space</td>
<td>makes individuals obedient</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The method that brought all these together was the use of a table. “The drawing up of ‘tables’ was one of the great problems of the scientific, political and economic technology of the eighteenth century” (148). “[T]he table was both a technique of power and a procedure of knowledge” (148) as it allowed authorities to organize large groups by providing an instrument that provided an “order” that could allow it to be controlled and mastered to gain productivity, a “cellular power” (149) or power that comes from the creation of spaces in cells. The power of the table comes from how the “twin operations in which the two elements—distribution and analysis, supervision and intelligibility—are inextricably bound up” (148). Importantly, this strategy of the table facilitates the controlling of both individuals and groups of people: “disciplinary tactics is situated on the axis that links the singular and the multiple. It allows both the characterization of the individual as individual and the ordering of a given multiplicity” (149).

After the division of space, the second aspect of discipline involves time and the “control of activity” (149). Just as with space, Foucault details a similar number of features of the disciplinary redeployment of time, many of which echo Marx’s comments in *Capital*.

The chief of these is the *time-table*, the numerical organization of time, similar to how the geometric table organizes space. Time is not simply detailed for how it should be spent, but is turned into sequenced activities that are constantly supervised to constitute “a totally useful time” (150) through the removal of distractions. This rationalization creates a time-work discipline that is often called Taylorization after the mechanical engineer and consultant Frederick Winslow Taylor (1856-1915) who studied work flows in factories with the goal of segmenting them into smaller, more efficient, steps to create greater divisions of labour. Foucault again traces the use of time to “the religious orders” but notes that “the disciplines altered these methods of temporal regulation from which they derived … by refining them. One began to count in quarter hours, in minutes, in seconds” (150).

Utility is thus created by the “temporal elaboration of the act” (151), which gives a timed value to physical acts. As “[t]ime penetrates the body and with it all the meticulous controls of power” (152), there will be a set programme—an “anatomo-chronological schema of behaviour” (152)—that dictates how long everything should take, not more, not less.

Thirdly, there is the “correlation of the body and the gesture” (152) where the body is taught to act in certain, precise ways. We are trained in a “gymnastics” of how we should hold our bodies and compose our physical gestures in order to achieve the efficiencies and time-keeping demanded by the prior two aspects of time discipline.
Fourthly, this disciplining means to have humans interact with objects through a new “body-object articulation” (153), where people become integrated with, rather than controllers of, non-animate processes. Foucault’s examples are taken from the military, in particular the soldier’s use of the rifle, but the driving force in this movement comes from the “coercive link with the apparatus of production” (153), by which Foucault means the methods that ensure that workers assimilate to the rhythms of machinery, rather than the reverse. The body will be like a machine. Borrowing from military theoreticians, Foucault calls this training of the body a “manoeuvre” (153). The body is not just exploited, it is also coercively taught to submit to a machinified “apparatus of production”. Disciplinary power joins the human body and objects in a new relationship: “Over the whole surface of contact between the body and the object it handles, power is introduced, fastening them to one another. It constitutes a body-weapon, body-tool, body-machine complex” (153).

The final aspect of time is “exhaustive use”, the “principle of non-idleness” or wasting time that “was counted by God and paid for by men” (154). Time-wasting was a “moral offence and economic dishonesty” (154), the latter because employers who pay an hourly wage see any time that the labourer is not using to make commodities as “stealing” time that could be used to generate wealth for the employer.

After these divisions of time and space, Foucault highlights the third aspect of discipline—human development. He somewhat awkwardly calls this process of development “the organization of genoses” (156), by which he means that the individual is placed in a pathway of personal development that will make her or him more useful, controllable and productive. This is the ideology of progressive evolution (genesis), where human nature is made to be productive on a schedule.

The organization of personal development, a “time of individuals” (157), is achieved in four ways. Firstly, time is divided into successive segments that must end at a certain time. Secondly, these segments are put into an analytical plan or sequence where one follows the other in increasing difficulty or complexity. Thirdly, each segment must end with an examination that will allow the supervisors to differentiate, rank and classify every individual. Lastly, after this ranking each individual will be given a role and range of exercises suited to their position in the hierarchy.

The clearest example of this process, and the most immediately recognizable one for many readers of this book, is the practice of an “analytical pedagogy” (159) in schools. Its processes of creating developmental times and spaces insist on judging our development through “linear”, “evolutive” (160) time, where we pass from class to class and year to year:

The ‘seriation’ of successive activities makes possible a whole investment of duration by power: the possibility of a detailed control and a regular intervention (of differentiation, correction, punishment, elimination) in each moment of time. … Temporal dispersal is brought together to produce a profit, thus mastering a duration that would otherwise elude one’s grasp. Power is articulated directly onto time; it assures its control and guarantees its use. (160)

We might also think of the pressure that making a resume forces on us, where we have to make sure that all of our lifetime can be accounted for in productive ways that justify the next stage of our development or promotion. A bad resume is one that has unexplained gaps. Foucault suggests that these procedures also merged with a larger scale of control, for the “two great ‘discoveries’ of the eighteenth century—the progress of societies and the genoses of individuals—were perhaps correlative with the new techniques of power” (160). A new kind of history is now possible, not one of “solemn events” but of “continuous evolutions” (161), a history of cultural development. Foucault correlates each of these moments with different “techniques of subjection”: “the ‘dynamics’ of continuous evolutions tends to replace the ‘dynasties’ of solemn events” (161). Although Foucault does not mention this implication explicitly, the civilizational ideal of development that came about in such a way was used for arguments where non-European societies could be presented as “behind”
European ones, but trainable to be like the more “advanced” or “developed” ones. This claim also lay the roots for social Darwinism, especially eugenics and theories of racial degeneration, since it was now possible to produce distinctions that saw people as more or less advanced along progressive history. Foucault calls the procedures at the centre of the individual’s linear development “exercise”, but it is a training that is never allowed to come to an end: “Exercise, having become an element in the political technology of the body and of duration, does not culminate in a beyond, but tends towards a subjection that has never reached its limit” (162).

The fourth and last aspect of discipline involves the “composition of forces” (162), where all the separate parts or segments are fitted together in an efficient and productive complex. Citing directly from Marx’s *Capital*, Foucault draws this comparison between military techniques and the problem of capitalist work relations where “cooperation” (163) between large groups of workers in linked units makes the labour force of a mass of workers greater than the individual sum of their parts. The model here is the machine, which Marx defines as an articulated system of instruments. In the same way, a social machine has to be created by a “carefully measured combination of forces” that is organized by a “precise system of command” (166), which ideally is directed by clear and simple signs. Foucault here clearly builds on Marx to construct his own theory of “discipline”: “Discipline is no longer simply an art of distributing bodies, of extracting time from them and accumulating it, but of composing forces in order to obtain an efficient machine” (164). There are three aspects of this composition. Firstly, the individual body is made to be a segment in a social machine. Secondly, time itself is also made to function like a machine. Lastly, the articulated system “requires a precise system of command” involving “signals” to help with the “training” or “dressage” of bodies (166).

Now Foucault reviews his argument, which can also be put in table form:

**Discipline creates:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>4 types of individuality through</th>
<th>4 techniques</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>cellular (spatial distribution)</td>
<td>drawing up tables (groups are contained and watched)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>organic (codes activities)</td>
<td>prescribing movements (proper maneuvers indicate standards)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>genetic (accumulates time)</td>
<td>imposing exercises (exercise is tied to an idea of progress)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>combinatorial (composition of forces)</td>
<td>arranging tactics (forges new collective identities)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This table of disciplinary techniques can also be written as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Object</th>
<th>Techniques</th>
<th>Instruments</th>
<th>Method</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Art of distribution</td>
<td>Space (architecture)</td>
<td>Cellular</td>
<td>Grid Plane (cells, places, ranks)</td>
<td>Hierarchical Observation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organization of geneses</td>
<td>Time (mechanics)</td>
<td>Genetic</td>
<td>Timetable of exercises</td>
<td>Normalization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Control of activity</td>
<td>Body (anatomy)</td>
<td>Organic</td>
<td>Code of activities</td>
<td>Normalizing Judgment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Composition of forces</td>
<td>Society (economy)</td>
<td>Combinatory</td>
<td>Tactics</td>
<td>Alliances created</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Disciplinary Institution</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For Foucault, these “tactics” form the general strategy of militarizing society (167). The eighteenth century “saw the birth of the great political and military strategy by which nations confronted each other’s economic and demographic forces; but it also saw the birth of meticulous military and political tactics by which the control of bodies and individual forces was exercised within states” (168). While we traditionally think of the Enlightenment period as focused on rationality and “the dream of a perfect society”, Foucault once more insists that it also developed a “military dream of society”, one organized not by ideas of nature, fundamental human rights and the social contract, but “meticulously subordinated cogs of a machine”, “automatic docility” and “permanent coercions” (169).

Here Foucault quotes Comte de Guibert (1743-1790), one of the great pre-Revolutionary theoreticians of military tactics, who argued for the need to create a national army and a plan for “total war”, based on the ideal of the Roman Republic/Empire, a linkage to which Foucault shortly returns. Foucault also draws attention to a letter from Marx that claims that the history of the military is important, since many features of modern capitalism
and bourgeois society, like the division of labour, were taken initially from military procedures. We tend to celebrate the Enlightenment for its defence of public law and the ideal of the independent citizen that was promoted with the example of Rome, but Foucault reminds us of the other Roman aspect, the society based on a double index: citizens and legionaries, law and manoeuvres. While jurists or philosophers were seeking in the pact a primal model for the construction or reconstruction of the social body, the soldiers and with them the technicians of discipline were elaborating procedures for the individual and collective coercion of bodies. (169)

Foucault now turns to the next section to describe the mechanisms of this new kind of bodily coercion.

2. The means of correct training

Unlike the older monarchical model of spectacular displays of power, discipline is a technique that tries not to draw attention to itself. Discipline works on a small-scale; it operates at the level of individuals, not masses, and uses “minor procedures” to create a “calculated, but permanent economy” (170) of control. The three main instruments that it uses are: hierarchical observation, normalizing judgment and the combination of the two in the form of the examination.

Hierarchical observation coerces individuals by making them clearly visible and keeping them under watch. It works by constructing (architectural) space in ways that allow for total supervision, especially in ways where the viewer remains unseen by the viewed. Foucault’s first example is the military camp that is formed in geometric lines for “general visibility” (171). The layout of military camps was then carried into the design of cities, such as with the mid-nineteenth century reconstruction of Paris’s streets into long, straight boulevards, “working-class housing estates, hospitals, asylums, prison, schools” (171), all sites where spaces could be embedded within one another for a telescopic viewpoint that provides “an internal, articulated and detailed control” (172).

Architecture now begins to change so that buildings are made less to be seen from the outside, in order to achieve a monarch-like monumental appearance. Now they become constructed so as to organize their internal spaces for the benefit of those who will use observation to “transform individuals” and “make people docile and knowable” (172). Some examples of the latter are schoolrooms with doors that allow for passing teachers to look in the classroom at any time or eating halls with a table raised for the supervisors. “These mechanism can only be seen as unimportant if one forgets the role of this instrumentation, minor but flawless, in the progressive objectification and the ever more subtle partitioning of individual behaviour” (173).

The “perfect disciplinary apparatus” turns its building into a “microscope of conduct”, an “apparatus of observation, recording and training” that would allow for a “single gaze to see everything constantly” (173). The ideal building has a central point, where a “perfect eye” could see all and to which everything had to turn for judging. The problem, however, is how to construct a building to create this kind of optical control. For this reason, circular architecture was often favoured at the time. For Foucault, this type of architecture became the expression of “a certain political utopia” (174).

Yet the problem of visual organization was especially a challenge for the new large-scale industrial factories, where even a circle loses efficacy when it becomes too wide. The older manufactories had a system of inspectors from the outside who would come in and inspect. But as “the machinery of production became larger and more complex, as the number of workers and the division of labour increased”, there needed to be an internally regulating corps: a “specialized personnel” of dedicated workers responsible for overseeing the process of production (174). Foucault argues that this “new régime of surveillance” of manager-
workers supervising the others was “indissociable from the system of industrial production, private property and profit” (175), especially in buildings that were too large or crowded for a centralized observation post.

Foucault now quotes from Marx’s Capital again on how “directing, superintending and adjusting becomes one of the functions of capital” and “[o]nce a function of capital, it requires special characteristics” (175). The watching of labourers aims not only to make them docile, but also to make them more productive, more profit-producing.

New forms of internal managerial supervision, first developed in factories, were then introduced into schools, as students were chosen to monitor other students. “Hierarchized, continuous and functional surveillance” (176) might not have been invented by the eighteenth century, but by making it part of an integrated system, the period turns observation into something like a machine itself. What is invidious about this optics is that because it only “looks” but does not “touch” the body, it seems to work outside of “force or violence”, even while it has a more subtle “physical” control of people (177).

Foucault here illustrates his ideas of how this modern form of power works. Two aspects are particularly important: firstly, disciplinary power is a “network of relations” that move “from top to bottom, but also to a certain extent from bottom to top and laterally” (176). This is an important qualification that distinguishes Foucault’s definition of modern power from those of other theoreticians who stress the repressive aspect of power “from top to bottom”. Secondly, disciplinary power is “not possessed as a thing”; rather, “it functions like a piece of machinery” (177). Again, Foucault here departs from other concepts of power, especially in the marxist tradition, that see power as the “property” of a particular group (e.g. the bourgeoisie), and replaces them with his notion of “a relational power” that “is everywhere and always alert” (177). Importantly, this definition of power is able to explain how individuals whose overall power may be limited can simultaneously be complicit in their own subjection and that of others. Foucault uses the spatial metaphor of the pyramid to suggest that modern power may have a “head”, but that individuals are distributed more widely in the field of power (177).

This control by sight emerges because of its linkage with a normalizing judgment (177), where individuals are simultaneously watched and evaluated. Once we enter an observed space, we become subject to a vision that seeks to ensure that we act well and follow certain kinds of behaviour. In this way, vision becomes the medium through which our actions can be constantly judged, not only for what we do that may break the rules, but also for how we fail to achieve a certain standard. The order we must follow is one that forces us to adapt to certain norms, more than simply obey regulations. This is a new kind of penalty, an “infra-penality” (178), which operates in areas not directly targeted by the law. Disciplinary institutions begin to operate through “a whole micro-penality” that is aimed at activities, manners and sexual behaviour, speech and body posture (178). Disciplinary mechanisms also work through moments of petty humiliation; they seek to get inside us and make us fearful of being different.
In this way, “disciplinary punishment” is “corrective” (179): it punishes us in order that we follow the models of behaviour, it is a kind of training device: “To punish is to exercise” (180). This approach succeeds because it gives acts values involving clear oppositions of good and bad that are tied to a system of rewards and punishments where we might receive merits and demerits depending on our actions in relation to the norm.

This procedure brings together five distinct operations: it forces individuals to be compared against a larger group wherein they are differentiated according to their adherence to a rule; it makes this rule a minimum threshold, an average or optimal result which one should aim for (neither too far above or below this median); it uses numbers (“quantitative terms”), rather than descriptive accounts, to measure the ideal value of individuals; these numbers stand as rules that constrain behaviour; and it characterizes those who fail to conform, in either direction from the median, as “abnormal” (183). “The perpetual penality that traverses all points and supervises every instant in the disciplinary institutions compares, differentiates, hierarchizes, homogenizes, excludes. In short, it normalizes” (183).

Normalizing differs from prior historical systems of punishments, which had a fixed code of rules that must be remembered and followed; the new system is now much more plastic and mobile, since the norm is determined in relationship to an ever-changing hierarchy within the network of other people. We are judged not based on our own achievements or transgressions but in relationship to what everyone else is doing. In the prior system of social control, one, more or less, could avoid punishment by not committing proscribed acts; in the disciplinary model, one must be ever alert to how one’s behaviour and personality exist in relationship to others. Whereas the older model punished illegal acts, the “penality of the norm” measures “the ‘nature’ of individuals” (183); that is, disciplinary power constructs and targets identities, rather than acts.

This institutes a sort of constant paranoia where individuals can never stop comparing their actions and “nature” to the perceived, or assumed, intangible norm. Yet because the group defining the norm is hard to see or comfortably know, since it is constantly fluid, we can never allow ourselves to rest in the secure knowledge that we have done the right thing. Since only the authority who can observe everyone is able to know what is the collective standard, we are left in a state of anxiety, wondering if our actions are sufficiently “normal” or not. Are we eating too much or too little, for instance? Are our sexual desires acceptable or perverted? And so on. This uncertainty makes us more dependent on authorities, like doctors, teachers, etc. to tell us if our actions, personalities and bodies are normal or not. Additionally, we also begin to internalize the function of supervision, even in the absence of a supervisor, as we begin to interrogate our “selves” to see if they are acceptably “normal”.

Hence the undertow of observation not only allows for individuals to be graded and ranked, punished and rewarded, but it exerts a “constant pressure to conform” (182) and enforces a desire to be normal. Yet disciplinary punishment does not look to make the individual confess to their crimes, nor does it even seek to stop, or repress, bad acts. Instead it wants to use the presence of our being judged as potentially bad in relation to others (the failure to meet the norm) as a device for making people subordinate and harder working, more docile and useful.

This “micro-economy of a perpetual penality” also means that because the individual is caught within ongoing reviews, a “cycle of knowledge” about the individual is created (181); the individual now has a dossier, a genetic lifesistory of his or her various deviations or adherence to a quantifiable norm. “The power of the Norm” becomes more widespread and “[l]ike surveillance and with it, normalization becomes one the great instruments of power” in the modern period (184).

Notice that Foucault’s examples are increasingly arguing for a similarity in different social institutions where the army ≈ courtroom ≈ school ≈ hospital ≈ prison ≈ factory. Today we might add the asylum or refugee camp to this list. As these disciplinary nodes constantly refer to each other and often collaborate, they create a network of control, with each centre radiating outward to blanket all aspects of society.

The creation of hierarchy through observation and a judgment about deviations from the norm becomes fused in the examination, in the dual sense of looking (to examine) and
grading (by subjecting individuals to tests). The examination is discipline’s ritual ceremony that establishes a “truth” about the subject, a knowledge that will both give individuals a subjective identity through their ranked result and objectify them as things to be maneuvered or exercised further.

Foucault argues that while there has been attention paid to the development of the human sciences and its investigation into the signs and means of how we know things to be true, there has been little enquiry into “what makes possible the knowledge that is transformed into political investment” (185). He describes this new use of information about individuals as a political device of control as an “epistemological ‘thaw’” (185, the phrase also occurs 187, 191, 224). The metaphor of something solid slowly melting away is slightly unusual for Foucault, who is often associated with sharp clean breaks in social history. Instead, he uses the word “thaw” to suggest that historical change is a slow process, full of multiple small stages, rather than one big break. The focus on the microscopic fits in here with his general argument that the noteworthy changes in the period’s formations of power were energized through the deployment of small, seemingly inconsequential affairs.

He then gives some examples on how institutions change when they make the act of “examining” routine. The first one is the hospital’s transformation into an “examining apparatus” (185) as the physician’s visits to patients became more regularized, scheduled and turned into a place of examining. Rather than a doctor appearing in times of emergency, like the priest, he comes more regularly, so that it seems as if the physician’s job is constant supervision of the patient, rather than to intervene in crises. In a likewise fashion, the hospital became a training institution to educate other doctors, and this changed the nature of the building as it became a place of knowledge gathering, rather than simply one of physiological repair.

In the same way, the school “became a sort of apparatus of uninterrupted examination” that “enabled the teacher, while transmitting his knowledge, to transform his pupils into a whole field of knowledge” (186). In the pre-disciplinary age, an exam came at the end of training, like an apprenticeship, and once the test was passed, you were free from observation. Now, schools constantly examine their students, since exam rankings are seemingly more important as a process rather than as a final release from the teacher.

The exam is also a means for professionals based within institutions to assert their authority. The daily examining round of the physician displaces that of the “unprofessional” priest. It also creates a knowledge (savoir), a medical discipline in the sense of what the doctor does and what s/he knows. The hospital, as institutional space, becomes “the physical counterpart of the medical ‘discipline’” (186).

The examination as technique has three actions. Firstly, it “transformed the economy of visibility into the exercise of power” (187). Previously, to be seen was an empowering gesture. The monarch’s spectacle of himself illustrated that he ought to be the centre of everyone’s attention, since he was the source of all secular power. In the modern disciplinary age, to be seen is to be disempowered, where visibility is a sign of being subordinated to the examining eye. The examination is the “ceremony” of an individual’s “objectification” (187).

Secondly, the examination brings individuals into “the field of documentation” (189); it registers them within a written dossier, where their performance and relative position to others can be tracked, compared and charted against the assumed norm. Indeed, the accumulation of dossiers provides the raw data to determine the numerical norm, as well. Once the “constitution of the individual as a describable, analysable object” that can be looked at in terms of their personal development is achieved, there can be “the constitution of a comparative system” that distributes people within a larger whole (190). These small techniques of arranging data about individuals were key to the creation of a “science” about the individual.

Finally, the “apparatus of writing” (190) within the examination-documentation complex makes each individual a “case” (a history, a story of abnormality), a singular problem that “has to be trained or corrected, classified, normalized, excluded, etc.” (191). Before the modern age, the ordinary individual was often “below the threshold of description”
because the form of society was only interested in larger commemorative histories involving states, military conquest and important figures, like monarchs.

Disciplinary methods reversed this by making the very smallest social unit, the ordinary individual, a matter of great interest and fascination as “a document for possible use” (191). When a person is now written about, it is not to make them seem heroic or worthy of public celebration and commemoration, instead it is to turn them into a case history, available only within the private circuits of professional evaluation. Consider how the people who have the biggest records on them are often the weakest in society; this documentation occurs because it is a “procedure of objectification and subjectification” often visited on “the child, the patient, the madman, the prisoner” (192).

In former times, the more one has power, the more one’s life is documented by “written accounts or visual reproductions” or named individually within a kinship group (193). This system was about “ascending” individualization, where individual naming was praising of “superior strength” (193). Discipline is about “descending” individualization, where naming is incriminating—the more individualized one is in disciplinary records, the less powerful one has become.

For Foucault, this “reversal of the procedures of individualization” is the precondition for the existence of “all sciences, analyses or practices employing the root ‘psycho-’” (193). The reversal of individualization results in the “substituting for the individuality of the memorable man that of the calculable man” (193), and it is “calculable man” who ultimately becomes the object of analysis for sciences like psychology or psychoanalysis.

Foucault here also comments on how this broader social shift was reflected in cultural forms or genres. In the Middle Ages, the chief cultural production was the adventure associated with the literary epic. In the modern age, it is the novel, the Bildungsroman (novel of development), with an “internal search for childhood” (193). This turn from “noble deed to the secret singularity…from combats to phantasies” (193) belongs to the formation of a disciplinary society and Foucault cites as an example the turn from the early modern Arthurian legends of the search for the visible Holy Grail to Freud’s case histories about neurotics and their search for the hidden secret of their infantile sexuality. The medieval epic adventure is now substituted by the internal search for childhood, Le bon petit Henri becomes little Hans (the name Freud used for one of his patients); Lancelot becomes Judge Schreber (Freud’s case study for paranoia). The older Romance tale of spiritual discovery through extramural conquest now becomes the Family Romance, Freud’s name for the Oedipal saga, where an adult seeks to overcome their parents, rather than political others.

Foucault once more cautions against limiting ourselves to the idea that individuality is a product only of mercantile capitalism’s notion of society as a “contractual association of isolated juridical subjects” (194). This political theory does require the production of individuals, but there was also a simultaneous “technique for constituting individuals as…elements of power and knowledge” (194). Political and economic liberalism required the development of disciplinary techniques.

Foucault also insists that we should not think of “the individual” as simply an “ideological representation” or falsehood, since it is a “reality fabricated by this specific technology of power” that he calls “discipline” (194). He argues that we need to stop thinking in terms of power as a force that is negative, as something that “excludes”, “represses”, “censors”, “abstracts”, “masks”, or “conceals” (a notion that Foucault calls the “Repressive Hypothesis” in his next work, known in English as The History of Sexuality: Volume I). More succinctly, he simply states here that power “produces reality; it produces domains of objects and rituals of truth. The individual and the knowledge that may be gained of him belong to this production” (194).

This is similar to his early claim that the exam, with its hierarchical surveillance and normalizing judgment, made possible the techniques of “distribution and classification, maximum extraction of forces and time, continuous genetic accumulation, optimum combination of aptitudes and, thereby, the fabrication of cellular, organic, genetic and combinatorial individuality” (192).
The notion that expressing our individuality is a feature of our weakness, rather than our strength, will be surprising to many. Foucault radically implies that the politics of personal identity, from the late 1960s onward, was a mistake, given that in the modern system of discipline, we could say that to be marked as having an identity is a feature of disempowerment. It might be worth considering this claim in relation to the new personal sharing networks, where people display their likes and dislikes on the internet. Does not this invite others to judge, and implicitly normalize, us? By laying bare and constantly recording our personalities, are we not complicit in our own imprisonment?

Having charted out the techniques of discipline, Foucault concludes this section by asking how it was that power could achieve such effects, and he will move onward to illustrate how a certain practice managed to achieve the effects that it sought to accomplish.

3. Panopticism

This section is surely the most familiar one for readers who know *Discipline and Punish* from anthologies. Interestingly, it is also the section that is most clearly based on English language materials and the one with illustrations that display Foucault’s point more cogently than the other plates included with *Discipline and Punish*. The ease in which this section achieves clarity, however, has often been at the expense of the rest of Foucault’s historical and political argument. When reading it, be sure to contextualize its claims within the rest of Foucault’s argument.

Foucault begins by contrasting the plague town with the leper colony. The plague town is modern-looking as it quarantines people by dividing space into gridded partitions that are constantly watched by officials for movements in, out and within. This surveillance is also based on a system of documentation and registration of who has become ill. By enclosing, segmenting, observing, evaluating and documenting the isolated space, the plague town “constitutes a compact model of the disciplinary mechanism” (197). While there is the “literary fiction” (197) of the plague town as a festival-like time and space when restrictions were lifted, with liberty to live more freely or escape from the oversight of authorities and compulsion to work, Foucault argues that there was also the total opposite, when “even the smallest details of everyday life” were organized by power—a “capillary” power that penetrated the most intricate areas of each person’s life (198).

The leper colony was more simply a matter of exclusion, of dumping individuals into an enclosed space of permanent exile in order, essentially, to make them unseen and forgotten. Against the physically marked leper’s exclusion through confinement, the plague city’s segmentation and its distributions and analysis stands as an entirely different model of social organization and correct training. The leper colony was a “pure community” of aliens, while the plague-town was a “disciplined society” (198) that enclosed people within a dossier of knowledge gathering. These spaces have two entirely different ways of exercising power. Leper-town is where an Other is repressively ostracized and excluded, while the plague city organizes illness and functions as a means of social inclusion, where people must constantly examine themselves for the presence of illness and then “produce” their normality (in this case, lack of disease) for viewing authorities.

Yet Foucault says that the gestures within these different projects come “slowly together” in the nineteenth century as the space of exclusion and “the technique of power proper to disciplinary partitioning” (199)—leper colony and plague town—merge and become applied within institutions such as “the psychiatric asylum, the penitentiary, the reformatory, the approved school and, to some extent, the hospital” (199). In these institutions, authorities had control over individuals whom they could differentiate through tactics of binary division (“mad/sane; dangerous/harmless; normal/abnormal”, 199) and coercive assignment, where people are distributed according to evaluations, which will determine what they must do. In this way, individuals are both excluded and included through constant, individualizing examination—they are “brand[ed]” and “alter[ed]” at the same time (199).
Foucault now turns to describe English utilitarian philosopher Jeremy Bentham’s plan for a privatized prison, *Panopticon: or, the Inspection-House* (1787). In this, Bentham (1742-1836) described the use of architecture to enable inspection for prisons, workhouses, factories, insane asylums, hospitals and schools. Foucault here gives a relatively documentary account of what Bentham proposes for the ideal prison’s construction. The prison should be a circular building with a central watchtower. Around this will be cells that are backlit with a window, allowing light to flow in and through the cell so as to make the prisoner visible to anyone looking from within the prison. In this way, a guard in the tower can observe the cells, the inhabitants of which will never know if they are being watched or not, since the tower’s watchroom is either cast in shadows or visually obstructed. If traditional prisons meant to enclose prisoners and hide them without light, Bentham’s only seeks to enclose them, but this time in full view where they can be controlled by surveillance. In this scheme, “[v]isibility is a trap” (200). The Panopticon thus both automates and deindividualizes the functioning of power, especially as it no longer matters who is in the central tower, or even if there is anybody at all. The prison becomes much cheaper and more efficient to run as it relies on the prisoner’s sense of being watched, rather than being threatened with physical force. While the King’s terror required the expense of a public ritual and guards, the Panopticon’s discipline only requires the prison’s silent architecture.

By isolating every individual in their own cell, the Panopticon breaks up the possibility of prisoners forming (rebellious) collectives, and it turns every prisoner into “the object of information, never a subject in communication” (200). Yet the Panopticon’s “major effect” is “to induce in the inmate a state of conscious and permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power” (201). Because prisoners can never know if they are being watched, the prisoners thus “become[s] the principle of [their] own subjection” (203) as they constantly police their behaviour in the fear that they might be observed at any time.

Like a zoo, the Panopticon also allows for its subjects to be differentiated into different categories or nomenclature classifications. Furthermore, it functions as a laboratory that can change behaviour and “train or correct individuals” (203) by allowing authorities to try out different punishments and analyze how successful they have functioned. As a place for “experiments on men”, a “laboratory of power” (204), the Panopticon even captures guards within its grasp, as it allows for the inspectors to themselves be inspected, thus destroying the barrier between the empowered and the disempowered.

If the plague town’s discipline appears only as an exceptional state in times of emergency, against an “extraordinary evil”, the panoptic principle is a generalized state “in the everyday life of men” (205). Because it only needs a certain architecture to achieve its effects, Bentham argues that the Panopticon can be used on subjects other than merely prisoners; its method works on hospital patients, schoolchildren, workers and psychiatric patients. As Bentham describes it: “Morals reformed—health preserved—industry invigorated—instruction diffused—public burthens lightened...all by a simple idea in architecture!” (207). Once this idea of the observational apparatus appeared, it was easily integrated through different institutions—“education, medical treatment, production, punishment” (206)—and spread very quickly throughout society. The Panopticon can thus be introduced to proliferate discipline in “the very foundations of society” (208) as a “procedure of subordination of bodies and forces that must increase the utility of power” while dispensing the need for a central authority, like the monarch (208).

Bentham’s idea became attractive since it helped to address the need for an inexpensive mechanism to increase power over larger populations and control over popular rebellions. Unlike the older monarch, who sought to impress through terrific spectacle, the Panopticon shows that disciplinary power is more productive if it works surreptitiously and through small details involving space, time and normalizing evaluations. Bentham’s project relies on “the capillary functioning of power” (198) that can do without a central authority, while facilitating power relations to spread throughout society, by means of its small arteries and veins. The Panopticon even appears as superficially democratic, since everyone, prisoners and guards, seem to be equally bound up within its optics.
The “Benthamite physics of power” (209) had operated earlier in European history, but it proposes a noteworthy historical transformation by encouraging that disciplinary techniques are spread out far more widely than they had ever done before. It proposes this extension through three processes.

The first is the “functional inversion of disciplines” (210) wherein institutions are now asked to produce, rather than repress, social phenomena. Discipline is not simply a negative means of neutralizing dangers or control floating populations; it does not look at people only to prevent them doing things. While it seeks to stop desertions from the military, workplace theft, or schoolchildren skipping classes, discipline is significantly combined with a moral and physical training that aims to create “useful individuals” (211), especially for factories and armies.

The second process involves the “swarming of disciplinary mechanisms” (211). Various different institutions begin to act like one another and collaborate in order to form a coherent whole achieved by the convergence of smaller disciplinary nodes. Not only do schools, hospitals and prisons increasingly operate like one another, they are also used as “centres of observation disseminated throughout society” (212) to form a network of surveillance not only of those within their walls, but crucially the population outside them as well (e.g. the homes and parents of schoolchildren). These institutions’ authorities increasingly became more confident that they have the right to go into public spheres and spaces that would have previously been thought “private” and free from interference by inspectors. Not only is the private space of the home, and all its (gendered) activities, penetrated by these authorities, but, increasingly, the private mind of the occupants, their behavioural morality and socialization, become the target of approval.

The third process is the “state-control of the mechanisms of discipline” (213). A centralized police apparatus develops that becomes involved with these different institutions so that the State can exercise surveillance on the population through communication with these different disciplinary apparatuses. Expanding on its role under royal absolutism, the police “added a disciplinary function to its role as the auxiliary of justice in the pursuit of criminals and as an instrument for the political supervision of plots, opposition movements or revolts” (214-215). The police, supported by “its armed force”, now intervened where the “enclosed institutions of discipline (workshops, armies, schools)” reached their limit, “disciplining the non-disciplinary spaces” (215).

Foucault, though, insists that discipline should not be linked to a specific institution or (state) apparatus, since it is a “type of power, a modality for its exercise, compromising a whole set of instruments, techniques, procedures, levels of application, targets; it is a ‘physics’ or an ‘anatomy’ of power, a technology” (215). This new type of power is used by institutions (like prisons), authorities (in schools or hospitals) and state apparatuses “whose major, if not exclusive, function is to assure that discipline reigns over society as a whole (the police)” (216). If we can easily speak of a disciplinary society, it is only because these techniques have been invested within and act as a linking device for several agencies, professionals and state bureaucracies.

Here Foucault repeats some of the earlier arguments as he contrasts a society of the spectacle to one of surveillance, and he argues that we descend today less from classical (Greek) society than the Napoleonic Empire in this regard. Unlike the great spectacles of Antiquity, with its intensity and sensuality of public life, the modern age is more inward looking and works on individuals, rather than masses of crowds, although every individual is caught under the blanket of observation.

The formation of a disciplinary society connects with a set of broader historical processes, three of which Foucault highlights: one economic, another juridical and political and the third scientific.

Firstly, the “disciplines are techniques for assuring the ordering of human multiplicities” (218) in ways that reduce the cost, both financially and politically, of their operation; intensify their effects while also broadening them; and increase the docility and utility of those subjected to their (educational, military, industrial or medical) institutions.
Discipline works because it is a technique for dealing with multiplicities cheaply (economic); it maximizes intensity (juridico-political); and links economic growth to apparatuses.

The “triple objective of the disciplines” (218) corresponds to the needs of the bourgeois-aligned social classes who were concerned about the effects of two historical developments. The first was a general concern about the increasing population, from the second half of the eighteenth century, and a specific one about the large numbers of displaced peasants and urban workers alongside an increase in those who had been placed inside certain kinds of institutions (the growth of schools, the emergence of a mass army, the increase of patients in hospitals). Demographic growth of an increased labouring class population created a floating (unemployed) population that was potentially threatening to the middle class. How could this undifferentiated and mobile mass be controlled and turned into a force of productive labourers?

The second concern was over the management of the new production processes within capitalist-oriented factories that constantly needed to increase their profit. The older forms of organizing production from the feudal and monarchical period were no longer capable of responding to explosive growth created by new technologies and work conditions. Instruments of production (i.e. industrialization, but also a more complex State) were becoming more complicated. The question was how to manage these processes more profitably in ways that would prevent the system from self-destructing.

To overcome the older “economy of power” (219), the social interests that promoted the use of discipline had to solve a number of problems. Initially they had to solve the riddle of the “inefficiency of mass phenomena”, as larger groups were often less productive than traditional ones. Consequently, there had to be a means for breaking up masses and calculating new ways for people to be segmented and distributed. Disciplinary interests thus had to master the forces of an “organized multiplicity”, while also neutralizing the “counter-power that springs from them and which form a resistance to the power that wishes to dominate: agitations, revolts, spontaneous organizations, coalitions—anything that may establish horizontal conjunctions” (219). To prevent these horizontal linkages, discipline both partitions and makes hierarchizing distinctions to scramble any possible social connections among the lower classes, while also increasing the efficiency of these smaller units by means of “hierarchical surveillance, continuous registration, perpetual assessment and classification” (220). Additionally, the forces of discipline have to bring in these new power relations discretely, in ways that do not arouse suspicions among those being controlled. Or, as Foucault says, “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).

The chief influence here involves the intermixture of disciplinary techniques for the “accumulation of capital” with those for “administering the accumulation of men” (220). These two processes of capitalist exploitation and discipline “cannot be separated; it would not have been possible to solve” one problem without the other (221) (Foucault here again draws on Marx’s *Capital* at this point). Capitalism and discipline are directly related: “[e]ach makes the other possible and necessary; each provides a model for the other” (221). The “growth of a capitalist economy gave rise to the specific modality of disciplinary power”; it is a power that “could be operated in the most diverse political régimes, apparatuses or institutions” (221).

The second historical process after capitalism that is significant for the introduction of discipline is the growth of bourgeois civil society and its mythology of a “formally egalitarian juridical framework” and “parliamentary, representative régime” (222). It was possible to guarantee “a system of rights that were egalitarian in principle” for a mass citizenry only because of the development of “systems of micro-power that are essentially non-egalitarian” (222). That is, disciplinary mechanisms are needed to ensure that these citizens will be made submissive within a system that appears to be one of equal rights and organized by consensual contracts. Foucault here draws attention to a “dark side” behind the egalitarian rhetoric: “The ‘Enlightenment’, which discovered the liberties, also invented the disciplines” (222). If democratic or republican society appears to distribute power more widely among the
lower classes, this was possible only because discipline covertly removes this power from them.

Foucault argues that the middle class had to come up with a system that seemed fair, rational and equalizing in order to overthrow the aristocratic and monarchical society, but they did not actually want to form a society in which they could not dominate the lower classes. So, while they promoted a language of rights, these were meant only for their own use, while the action of discipline was directed, surreptitiously, to the labouring classes as an “infra-law” and “counter-law” against the public “law” of equality (222). Discipline acts as a protective counter-weight to the law of equality because it creates a relationship between individuals that involves constraints that are “entirely different from contractual obligation” (222), since these constraints are structurally created for the “non-reversible subordination of one group of people by another” (222-223), namely the subordination of the lower classes to the bourgeoisie.

The rise of capitalism and bourgeois civil society are the first two processes responsible for the success of discipline, but there is also a third one, which involves the emergence and development of the “human” sciences, like psychology, psychiatry, pedagogy and criminology, where the branches of knowledge crossed a unique threshold in the eighteenth centuries. While the scientific advances of the period are well documented, because they often correspond to academic subjects, Foucault argues that discipline and its related knowledge production is as important as the others. He considers the inquisitorial juridical investigations in the Middle Ages as akin to the “birth of the states and of monarchical sovereignty” as well as early empiricism (225). A similar correlation occurs in the modern period with the “sciences of man” and the rise of civil society and a capitalist economy. If the public execution was the “logical culmination of a procedure governed by the Inquisition”, then the “practice of placing individuals under ‘observation’ is a natural extension of a justice imbued with disciplinary methods and examination procedures” (227). Modern penality is characterized by efforts to problematize the criminal’s personality, more than the crime itself; the concern to punish in a way that will be a “correction, a therapy, a normalization” of this personality; and the division of judgment among “various authorities that are supposed to measure, assess, diagnose, cure, transform individuals” (227). But these disciplinary techniques are not limited to prison alone, as they are taken up and distributed throughout society by similar kinds of institutions and their “experts in normality, who continue and multiply the functions of the judge” (228). Hence, Foucault ends by asking: “Is it surprising that prisons resemble factories, schools, barracks, hospitals, which all resemble prisons” (228)?

At this point, it might help to review by a table the differences between the terror of the Ancien Régime and modern discipline. Keep in mind that the table leaves out the second, intermediary phase of punishment for the sake of emphasis.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Torture</th>
<th>Discipline</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ancien Régime (early modern)</td>
<td>Modernity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>External punishment</td>
<td>Internalized punishment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disfigured body</td>
<td>Docile body, the “soul”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Main site is scaffold (public “ceremony of pain”)</td>
<td>Main site is prison (&quot;secrecy of administration&quot;)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spectacle</td>
<td>Surveillance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Punishment occurs at one concentrated point</td>
<td>Punishment happens in multiple nodes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Terror - punishment is atrocious</td>
<td>Humanism - punishment is gentle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Punishment is enacted by:</td>
<td>Punishment is enacted by:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shameless Punisher</td>
<td>Ashamed System</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(King-executioner proudly displays body to crowd)</td>
<td>(several “experts” distribute responsibility)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The criminal act is punished</td>
<td>The criminal identity is punished/reformed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private Trial/Public Punishment</td>
<td>Public Trial/Private Punishment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The confession must be repeated</td>
<td>The dossier is be repeated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(The subject speaks)</td>
<td>(The subject is spoken about)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Point of penalty: stop popular resistance by repression</td>
<td>Point of penalty: stop popular resistance by producing personality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Punishment can be ended by:</td>
<td>Punishment can be ended by:</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The King’s Lenient Pardon of the Criminal
Crime is represented as an:
attack against the King’s body as natural and eternal

Crime against authority
Penalty organized by the Paternal King
Visibility is a sign of authority
Juridical investigation
Status

Society’s Therapeutic Cure of the Criminal
Crime is represented as an:
attack against civil society
(property/labour contract as social contract)
Crime against property
Penalty organized by the middle class
Visibility is a sign of abnormality
Disciplinary examination
Class