

Discipline and Punish, “The Carceral” pp. 293-308

In the body of this chapter Foucault outlines the consequences of moving the techniques of the prison to the whole social body. With your discussion partner, locate the numbered section from which your quote is taken, and come up with answers to the questions that follow to share with the class.

1. “Replacing the adversary of the sovereign, the social enemy was transformed into a deviant, who brought with him the multiple danger of disorder, crime and madness. The carceral network linked, through innumerable relations, the two long, multiple series of the punitive and the abnormal” [299-300]. What do you think Foucault means here? What is *deviance* (think: sociology, mathematics)? Who do you think of as a “deviant” now, and what modes of social engagement do “we” have with “deviants”?
2. “Although it is true that prison punishes delinquency, delinquency is for the most part produced in and by an incarceration which, ultimately, prison perpetuates in its turn” [301]. Do you agree that criminals are “for the most part” the product of the criminal justice system? What is the alternative view here?
3. “By means of a carceral continuum, the authority that sentences infiltrates all those other authorities that supervise, transform, correct, improve. It might even be said that nothing really distinguishes them any more except the singularly ‘dangerous’ character of the delinquents, the gravity of their departures from normal behaviour and the necessary solemnity of the ritual. But, in its function, the power to punish is not essentially different from that of curing or educating” [303]. What is Foucault’s larger point in this section [pp. 301-303]? Do you agree with this quote?
4. “The activity of judging has increased precisely to the extent that the normalizing power has spread. Borne along by the omnipresence of the mechanisms of discipline, basing itself on all the carceral apparatuses, it has become one of the major functions of our society” [304]. How is this claim connected to the development of ideas of the normal and abnormal? In what ways are you judged to be normal or abnormal and invited to judge the normality or abnormality of others? (Or might you, if you become a teacher, a doctor, an educator, a social worker...?)
5. “The carceral network constituted one of the armatures of this power-knowledge that has made the human sciences [those fields of inquiry concerned with knowing the human being; most often, what we could call “the humanities and social sciences”] historically possible” [305]. How does Foucault reach this conclusion? Do you agree? Does considering this argument make you think any differently about the modern “disciplines” we study in university—perhaps especially psychology, sociology, criminology, political science?
6. “In the midst of all these mechanisms of normalization, which are becoming ever more rigorous in their application, the specificity of the prison and its role as link are losing something of their purpose” [306]. Why does Foucault draw this conclusion, and is he backing off any of his earlier claims? Do you think that contemporary prisons are the kind of thing he was describing in 1975? Do we still live in a carceral network?