

Foucault, DP Part 3 Chapter 3: “Panopticism”
PHIL 449, Spring 2014

Panopticon: “the diagram of a mechanism of power reduced to its ideal form” (205)

1. General characteristics of this mechanism of power

- visibility and invisibility (200-201)
 - individuals continually visible
 - power is somewhat invisible: visible but not verifiable at any given time whether anyone is watching
 - individuals not visible to each other
- the “conscious and permanent visibility ... assures the automatic functioning of power” (201)
 - individuals police their own behaviour (202-203)
- power is automatized and disindividualized, anonymous
 - “Power has its principle not so much in a person as in a certain concerted distribution of bodies, surfaces, lights, gazes; in an arrangement whose internal mechanisms produce the relation in which individuals are caught up” (202)
 - anyone can be in the place of the observer, with any motives; the mechanism still works the same way (202)
- this mechanism of power allows for its own observation: the observers themselves can be observed; the operations of the whole mechanism can be inspected as well (207)
- allows for generation of knowledge
 - observation allows for easy recording of information about the observed, then use of this to generate knowledge and classify individuals into categories (203)
 - “... knowledge follows the advances of power, discovering new objects of knowledge over all the surfaces on which power is exercised” (204).

2. Panopticon is a generalizable model” that can be applied in many forms to the everyday lives of people (205)

There was a “gradual extension of the mechanisms of discipline throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, [they] spread throughout the whole social body ... [and formed] what might be called in general the disciplinary society” (209).

- a. disciplinary mechanisms worked at first in specific institutions, such as the military, schools, hospitals; but they became “de-institutionalized,” “broken down into flexible methods of control, which may be transferred and adapted” (211).
- b. some reasons for this spread (optional part of the chapter)
 - “the large demographic thrust of the eighteenth century” meant larger groups to be supervised in schools, factories, hospitals (218)

- need to order these disorderly masses, increase their utility and their docility (obedience) at the same time
- disciplinary power addresses potential resistance well: separates people, so harder to work together; hierarchizes them so they compete with each other rather than resisting; it operates somewhat discreetly; people end up disciplining themselves
- “ ... 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)

- capitalism

- increasing numbers of people in production needed capital, and vice versa: “it would not have been possible to solve the problem of the accumulation of men without the growth of an apparatus of production capable of both sustaining them and using them; conversely, the techniques that made the cumulative multiplicity of men useful accelerated the accumulation of capital” (221)
- disciplinary techniques support growth of capitalism: “the separation, coordination and supervision of tasks” is made efficient through disciplinary power (221)
- disciplinary power “was one of the basic tools for the establishment of industrial capitalism” (*Society Must be Defended*, p. 36; assigned for last week)

- political discourses of the Enlightenment

- the idea of equal rights and liberties is supported by the disciplines: “The real, corporeal disciplines constituted the foundation of the formal, juridical liberties” (222)
- “The general juridical form that guaranteed a system of rights that were egalitarian in principle was supported by these tiny, everyday, physical mechanisms, by all those systems of micro-power that are essentially non-egalitarian and asymmetrical that we call the disciplines” (222)

How/why might this be the case?

- Also, the increasing emphasis in political discourse on egalitarian, representative government, universal laws, rights and freedoms, helps to allow the spread of disciplines:
 - this political discourse of egalitarianism, universal rights, etc. “made it possible to superimpose on the mechanisms of discipline a system of right that concealed its mechanisms and erased the element of domination and the techniques of domination involved in discipline, and ... guaranteed that everyone could exercise his or her own sovereign rights thanks to the sovereignty of the state” (*Society Must be Defended*, p. 37).