

DISCIPLINE, SECURITY, AND BEYOND: A BRIEF INTRODUCTION

Discipline and Punish shattered the way many of us thought about punishment and modern society and, for many years, served as one leading optic through which we analyzed penal practices and institutions. The book functioned as a quintessential work in critical theory: it lifted the veil from our eyes, it enlightened us, it fundamentally changed the way we understood contemporary punishment practices. Michel Foucault had shown the lie: we were not punishing less or in a more civilized manner, it turns out, we were punishing *better*. Our cherished enlightenment thinkers had not tamed punishment, they had perfected it—and this raised the larger question, at the very heart of Foucault’s enterprise, of how it was exactly that we had come to believe that progress narrative in the punishment field. It turned our attention to the issues of veridiction: of how dominant beliefs become, well, dominant, and at what price.

The concept of *discipline* that Foucault deployed in his work shed light on a number of practices and institutions—on order maintenance policing and parole systems, on video-surveillance and data mining, on electronic monitoring and juvenile boot camps. But there developed, during the twentieth century, many other penal practices and institutions that did not match the disciplinary frame. The power-knowledge critique still made sense of them, but the category of *discipline* seemed somewhat askew.

2004 marked the publication of Michel Foucault’s 1978 and 1979 lectures at the Collège de France—*Sécurité, territoire, population* and *Naissance de la biopolitique*.¹ To many, Foucault’s lectures offered the possibility of enriching our study of the carceral sphere and expanding our analysis to the years following 1840—the year, Foucault wrote in *Discipline and Punish*, in which the carceral system was “completed.”² The 1978 and 1979 lectures—parts of which had already been popularized by means of the 1991 translation and publication of the “Governmentality” lecture in *The Foucault Effect*³—were known to be a location in which Foucault had gone beyond the concept of *discipline* to develop an account of power distinguished from both the disciplinary and the juridical models. The lectures, we also knew, had continued to theorize *biopower*, which had punctuated the first volume of *The History of Sexuality*—a text which also shed light on the transition to the question of ethics that consumed Foucault’s final years.

In his 1978 and 1979 lectures, Foucault traced a genealogy of a different form of governance that he called at first “security,” but then later renamed “governmentality.” In *Sécurité, territoire, population*, he recounted the development and maturation of *sécurité* through different historical periods, including the pastoral model of Christian mentoring, the *raison d’État* model of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, as well as eighteenth century liberalism. The following year, in *Naissance de la biopolitique*, Foucault traced modern governmental rationality—what he referred to later as neoliberalism—back to the birth of public economy and showed how modern rationality was characterized by explicit self-limitation: in contrast to the *raison d’État* of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, which sought an infinite objective, modern governmentality was characterized by its own self-limitation. It was all about “not governing too much,” in the words of Benjamin Franklin and the marquis d’Argenson.⁴

At the heart of the lectures was this concept of *sécurité*, which differed in three important ways from *discipline*. First, whereas *discipline* cabined, concentrated, and enclosed its space of operation, *sécurité* was centrifugal: “The apparatuses of security . . . have the constant tendency to expand; they are centrifugal. . . . Security therefore involves organizing, or anyway allowing the development of ever-wider circuits.”⁵ Second, whereas discipline focused on even the smallest infractions, *sécurité* let the small things go. “The apparatus of security . . . lets things happen. . . . allowing prices to rise, allowing scarcity to develop, and letting people go hungry . . .”⁶ Third, whereas discipline sought to eliminate and eradicate completely, *sécurité* in contrast tried only to minimize—to seek an optimal level of the targeted behavior, to achieve a certain equilibrium. Not to eliminate, but to regulate to the most advantageous level. *Sécurité* was pragmatic. It tried to figure out how to optimize. In sum, *sécurité* differed significantly from *discipline* in its modes of functioning. As Foucault explained: “An apparatus of security . . . cannot operate well except on condition that it is given freedom, in the modern sense that it acquires in the eighteenth century: no longer the exemptions and privileges attached to a person, but the possibility of movement, change of place, and processes of circulation of both people and things.”⁷

Foucault’s 1978 and 1979 lectures contained a wealth of insights about punishment, penal techniques, the development of the police, and their relationship to neoliberalism. The lectures were extremely useful for thinking about the entire social body in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, and specifically about the practices that characterize the contemporary penal sphere. And thus we set out, in these essays, to explore

contemporary penal practices in conversation with the newly published lectures—but also, naturally, in conversation with Foucault’s earlier writings on *épistémès* and his later turn to ethics and truth telling, to veridiction and *le dire vrai*, to *parrésia*.

Shortly before his death in 1984, Foucault gave a pseudonymous account of his life’s own work for publication in a *Dictionnaire des philosophes*.⁸ Writing about himself under the name Maurice Florence, Foucault described the organizing question of his work as an inquiry into the productive relationship between subjects and objects, of discovering “the processes of subjectivization and objectivization that allow for the subject to become, as subject, an object of knowledge.”⁹ Understanding these interdependent processes is ultimately a question of “veridictions” and “truth games” that can establish the “rules according to which, with respect to certain things, what a subject may say stems from questions of truth and falsehood.”¹⁰ Or, as he put it, his work captured:

[T]he history of “veridictions,” understood as the forms according to which discourses capable of being deemed true or false are articulated with a domain of things: what the conditions of that emergence have been; what price has been paid for it, as it were; what effects it has had on the real; and the way in which, linking a certain type of object with certain modalities of the subject, it has constituted for a time, a space, and particular individuals, the historical a priori of a possible experience.¹¹

In other words, the question of how a subject becomes an object of knowledge is not a question about the truth or falsity of a particular subject or subject-as-object, but rather about how there comes to be a way of talking about truth or falsehood at all. The project, which he insisted connected the breadth of his work, was to illuminate these rules, these truth games, and these practices of establishing truth. It was centered on discourse and the *savoirs* under which practices and techniques can be meaningfully referred to in a language of truth and falsehood.

Foucault’s pseudonymous account of his own work described three ways in which he undertook this work, each way corresponding to a different body of his published books. First, as an investigation of the “‘human sciences,’ examined with reference to the practice of the empirical sciences and their particular discourse in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries,” carried out in *The Order of Things*. Second, as an analysis of “the constitu-

tion of the subject as it might appear on the other side of a normative distribution and become an object of knowledge—as an insane, ill, or delinquent individual: here his approach involved practices such as psychiatry, clinical medicine, and the penal system,” carried out in *The History of Madness*, *The Birth of the Clinic*, and *Discipline and Punish*. Third, Foucault described what would turn out to be his final project, *The History of Sexuality*, as a study of “the constitution of the subject as its own object.” This project was, he wrote, “the third panel of a triptych, joining his other analyses of the relations between subject and truth.”¹²

The only oblique reference he made here to his research from 1978 and 1979 was to the question of “governance,” in which the “subject is objectivized for itself and for other subjects.”¹³ But this language is far more reminiscent of the lecture courses of the early 1980s, *Hermeneutics of the Subject* (1982) and *The Government of Self and Others* (1983 and 1984). As has been noted, the trajectory of this “third panel” changed dramatically between the publication of the first and second volumes of the *History of Sexuality*. By Foucault’s own account, this change in direction was a “change of mind.”¹⁴ In a May 1984 interview with François Ewald, Foucault stated that “I had begun to write two books in accordance with my original plan; but very quickly I got bored.”¹⁵ There is at least a possible implication that the program of study in those years, including the 1978 and 1979 lectures, was in part what bored Foucault. But it may be instead that the investigation of *sécurité* and *biopower* marked the transition in Foucault’s thought as he moved from his self-described second to third moments in the triptych of his corpus.

The essays in these *Carceral Notebooks* engage all three triptychs of Foucault’s writings and thought on the central question of our contemporary punishment practices and institutions. The original questions that we posed ourselves and that led to these essays were: How do the 1978 and 1979 lectures enrich our theorizing after *Discipline and Punish*? What do they bring to us, in the wake of *Discipline and Punish*, as theorists and analysts of the carceral system? Naturally, though, it was impossible to address these questions without also engaging the other facets of Foucault’s work, and the result is a set of essays that explore the penal sphere in engagement with these multiple dimensions of Foucault’s thought. The carceral system, as Foucault described in the closing pages of *Discipline and Punish*, was central to the account of how a particular technique (in that case, the penitentiary technique) could be “transported from the penal institution to the entire social body.”¹⁶ In so far as the techniques have continued to change and the social body continues to be redefined, the analysis of the carceral

also necessarily continues to change. Our task in these *Carceral Notebooks* has been to explore our contemporary penal practices in conversation with Foucault.

Foucault himself was said to have found the large auditorium lecture format less than ideal because it frustrated his ability to work through the research he was presenting. Foucault described the problem in this way: “We ought to be able to discuss what I have put forward. Sometimes, when the lecture has not been good, it would not take a lot, a question, to put everything right. But the question never comes.”¹⁷ The essays collected in these *Carceral Notebooks* span disciplines, interpretive methods, genres, and even language. What unites them is a shared concern for theorizing contemporary penalty in its varied forms and above all, an interest in asking precisely the kind of questions that might “put everything right”—fully conscious, of course, that veridiction itself, the very idea that we could “put things right,” is at the heart of our questioning and inquiry.

Notes

- 1 Michel Foucault, “*Sécurité, territoire, population: cours au Collège de France, 1977-1978*”, ed. Michel Senellart (Paris: Gallimard, 2004); Michel Foucault, *Naissance de la biopolitique: cours au Collège de France, 1978-1979*, ed. Michel Senellart (Paris: Gallimard, 2004); Michel Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population: Lectures at the Collège De France, 1977-1978*, trans. Graham Burchell (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007); Michel Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics: Lectures at the Collège De France, 1978-79*, trans. Graham Burchell (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008).
- 2 Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Vintage Books, 1995), 293.
- 3 Graham Burchell, Colin Gordon, and Peter Miller, eds., *The Foucault Effect: Studies in Governmentality* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991).
- 4 Foucault, *Naissance de la biopolitique*, at 27 n.10.
- 5 Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population*, at 45; Foucault, *Sécurité, territoire, population*, at 46 (« les dispositifs de sécurité... ont perpétuellement tendance à élargir, ils sont centrifuges.... Il s’agit donc d’organiser, ou en tout cas de laisser se développer des circuits de plus en plus larges »).
- 6 Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population*, at 45; Foucault, *Sécurité, territoire, population*, at 47 (« Le dispositif de sécurité ... laisse faire. ... Laisser monter les prix, laisser la rareté s’établir, laisser les gens avoir faim... »).
- 7 Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population*, at 48-49; Foucault, *Sécurité, territoire, population*, at 50 (« Un dispositif de sécurité ne peut bien marcher...qu’à la condition, justement, que l’on donne quelque chose qui est la liberté, au sens modern [que ce mot] prend au XVIIIe siècle: non plus les franchises et les privilèges qui sont attachés à une personne, mais la possibilité de mouvement, déplacement, processus de circulation et des gens et des choses »).
- 8 Michel Foucault, “Foucault, Michel, 1926-,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Foucault*, ed. Gary Gutting (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994). Guy Casadamont discusses this entry in his essay in these *Carceral Notebooks*.
- 9 *Ibid.*, 315.
- 10 *Ibid.*
- 11 *Ibid.*
- 12 *Ibid.*, 316.
- 13 *Ibid.*, 319.
- 14 Michel Foucault, *Foucault Live* (New York: Semiotext(e), 1989), 293.
- 15 *Ibid.*
- 16 Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 298.
- 17 Quoted by Gérard Petitjean, “Les Grande Prêtres de l’université française,” *Le Nouvel Observateur*, 7 April 1975, excerpted in Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population*, at xiv.