

Foucault's discipline and punish



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A Critical Analysis of Foucault's Concept of Punishment as Upheld in the "Discipline and Punishment" Michael Foucault's "Discipline and Punishment" primarily deals with the following themes: "Power and knowledge", "the body", "the history of soul", "the prison and society" and "paradox and contrast". In fact, these themes are integral parts of a bigger scenario, that is, namely the theory of social discipline. Foucault assumes that discipline, which is, indeed, a response to the reformists' demand to social body (public) as an integrated part of a political system, is one of the social constructs. For him, the social body is an organic group of individuals who have supposedly internalized a set of society (or community) acknowledged norms, rules, regulations and values through other disciplinary organizations (Erlandson 21). 'Body' occupies a crucial part in Foucault's social disciplinary theory. Since punishment cannot be non-corporal, the goal of modern punishment system should be to produce 'docile body' through continuous regulation and supervision. A 'docile body' is supposed to be dominated by an individual's soul. So, modern penal system must focus on the reform of the individual's soul. For Foucault, 'soul' is an individual's psychic mechanism which regulates the actions and behaviors of the 'body' in response to and in accordance with the demands of the existing political power or the regime of power and knowledge (Foucault, "Power/Knowledge", 18). Since 'body' is the subject of "political technology", modern society is endowed with a penal system which helps the body or the individual to create or reprogrammed a soul which, internalizing the fear of punishment, overpowers a docile body. For Foucault, the internalized prison is much stronger than the one, built of concrete.

Foucault's "Discipline and Punishment" is, indeed, dedicated to explaining

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the modern penal system. Referring to the public corporal execution and punishment of the delinquents on the scaffold during ancient and medieval ages, Foucault argues that punishment was not only judicial but also political. Punishment as a political ritual was aimed to let the public body internalize the fear of the King or political authority as the authority of the individual's body. According to him, the focus of punishment, as a more generalized form ' Discipline', shifted from ' body' to ' soul' during the Reform Movement in Europe. Through social disciplinary institutions, people were supposed to internalize the panoptic presence of power. During the modern age, " The right to punish has shifted," as Foucault says, " from the vengeance of the sovereign to the defense of the society" (90). Due to the rise of individualism, the political power in a society becomes dedicated to the wellbeing of the mass. So, the panoptic imprisonment replaces the visual public punishment. In modern penal system, the idea of ' prison' is both material and symbolic. A prison, made of concrete, is to let the delinquents feel the prison authority as the agent of a larger power system. But other social disciplinary institutions function as the agents which assist the individuals to internalize the panoptic authority of the society (Holligan 34-35). In fact, the " process of observing the members of a social institutions without being observed" helps the members of a society to internalize the social disciplines and the sociopolitical authority as a corporeal punisher (Smart 78). Indeed, through this process of internalization, first the authority in power is abstracted into an image as an omniscient punisher; then it is instilled into the cognitive faculty of the body.

Works Cited

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