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Prisons are old in our society. Not simply penal institutions but their premise. This premise is what we now comprehend as "penological interests." These being varied in their exact details and measures employed in attempting to accomplish them. All, regardless of locale (i.e., Cuba, France, Russia, the United States, etc.), strive for a common objective: ensuring social order through the punishment of those who offend against society. Over the last two or three decades a change or, perhaps, only a minor divergence in penological theory and administration has moved towards rehabilitation. There are those at the forefront of this divergence in philosophy who believe the prosperity of society - present and future - depends on correcting criminality, antisocial behaviors and rehabilitating those afflicted by these and other root problems. Admirable as this is, its examination is beyond the scope and purpose of this essay, which is solely to outline the paradoxical correlation between penological interests and institutional violence.

The manner by which anyone, including you my dear Reader, may find themselves prisoners is infinite: by conscious thought and deed, by mistake, by association, by a lapse in judgement, or by an eruption of uncontrollable emotional distress. While the details may vary, the essence remains consistent: infringement on social order. This is the fundamental basis of crime, consequently the origins of penological interests as well. For as long as prisons, in any form,



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have been around; crime has predated them, even the thought of them. One thing that has predated both, crime and punishment, is violence; or better said, conflict.

As a first-time prisoner in the Colorado Department of Corrections (C.D.C.), it surprises me how very few administrators, guards, or those in corrections recognize that prisons are naturally hostile environs due to their unique constitution; more on this later. I'm stupified by how many fail to fully understand that an atmosphere composed of angst, tension, aggression, social deviance, antisocial disorders, anger and rage, power, control, oppression, and a constant struggle of will against will; that such an environment is bound to, and frequently, explode in episodes of minor and extreme violence. It is a strange reality that those in corrections even if they acknowledge the inherent hostility of prisons. They still cannot comprehend the prisoner's violence, even though it is an inevitable consequence of prison. Any kind of explanation, any plausible and socially beneficial explanation, is to be found in the individual.

Prison population is singular in its general composition. Found in any prison are those persons who deviate from social order, infringing and committing offenses against society. Regardless of the severity of their deviant behavior, whether premeditated, conscious, unconscious, circumstantial, or accidental. Those in prison, as far as society is concerned, have made



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some or other transgression. As it concerns us here the specific offense is of no real import.

When in society these individuals present a disruptive element to the nice and orderly functions of society and relations. Many are violent, overly aggressive, manipulative, deceitful, afflicted with mental illnesses or physiological diseases such as addiction, and some are psychotic, psychopathic, or just plain sociopaths. People displaying any or all of these anti-social characteristics normally tend towards criminality, according to doctors Robert D. Hare (author of *Without Conscience: The Disturbing World of Psychopaths Among Us*); and Hervey Cleckley (author of *The Mask of Sanity*). What would be the most probable outcome of any system; whose interests lied in removing the most disobedient, destructive, obstinate, problematic and distressing elements of any society; isolating them for punishment, but still allowing, in fact, mandating they socialize amongst one another? Well, you would get what is daily and annually transpiring in the C.D.C.: violence in every degree. From intense arguments and threats to fist fights, bloody attacks and finally, murders. Considering this alone, one can clearly see why there is institutional violence, why prisoners fight. Pressures on the individual are of immense variety and weight. As such, there are other equally important contributing factors.

In society this element would barely come into close, continual contact, and thus, competition with others of its



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same characteristics. "Barely" meaning instances outside of cohabitation, cooperation for certain duration, as long as their interests may align or advantages may be gained. Interesting but foreseeable, if not predictable, disruptive elements tend to be very social amongst themselves; if only in an abnormal manner.

From my experience administrators lack a comprehension necessary to mitigate the intrinsic volatility of a subsociety singularly deviant in nature. I can say this because, apparently, they are prepared to construct "reactionary safeguards" and disseminate the appearance of proactivity. Yet, when violence and violent conflict find realization, they are shocked. Were there any actual comprehension of the combative society penological interests create; there could be no reaction of shock. The C.D.O.C. is peopled by every shade of the dissident element of society. How could anyone in corrections not see the obvious consequence? This denotes a troubling revelation: Malignant disconnect.

"Malignant" meaning unhealthy, dangerous, or lethal. "Disconnect" meaning willful incomprehension, a conscious refusal to acknowledge reality. After discussions with numerous persons in corrections, administrators and guards, I've come to this conclusion, that the malignant disconnect originates from a disastrous mentality prevalent within



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corrections. Correctly serving penological interests means in very many instances, caring without caring; being humane without humanity; interacting without being deferential; building relationships without being emotionally invested. Talk about a paradox! It is no wonder so many quit and move on to more sane work. Penological interests demand and require that the prisoner be oppressed and subjected to the will of the C.D.O.C. (see my article "The Adoption of Capitalistic Controls," for more on subjection in prison, Under Lock & Key No. 54; [www.prisoncensorship.info](http://www.prisoncensorship.info)); pitting individual against individual, prisoner against prisoner, prisoner against guard or administrator; will striving against man, system, and all maneuvering for advantage, or greater expression in the slightest degree.

From these contradictions, the aftermath of their collision, is the production of institutional violence. It is impossible that any other result could occur. In nature (read society) there are checks and balances, but in the C.D.O.C., all such natural governors have been abolished. The individual, the dissident element, has been placed into an artificial society; where the rules, expectations and norms promulgated, by those in corrections, are subject to those derived by a unique subculture composed of the criminal element. Penological interests disregard the most important



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variable quantity in the formula for achieving their objectives - the individual. These interests seek to dehumanize the individual, relegating him or her to equal value with an inanimate object and attempt to impose their will (read pressure) for compliance. When dealing with deviants this attitude is dangerous on an individual level and lethal in a communal setting. Considering the foregoing, is it any surprise that prisoners will argue, bicker, fight, struggle, rebel and even go so far as to kill? What more can be expected given the conditions imposed? Due to man's power of reason, that capability for intellectual ponderances, man can not be domesticated as one would a canine, bird, or cattle. Since domestication and docility, in other words complete submission; are not terms well-known or understood by the deviant community of any society. Perhaps, this is why here in the U.S. when punishments and restrictions increase in severity within prisons, institutional violence increases in intensity? Is there any other outlet from penal pressures?