1. I’m very affected by Eve Ensler’s comment that women are in prison because of mistakes that may have taken a moment or may have been longer. But that in each case the mistake became the woman. Two things are worth unpacking in terms of this observation.
   a. One has to do with our image of what a criminal is, and in particular our sense that it either represents a status linked to an identity or that it represents a long-term behavior pattern that is “essential” to the prisoner so that we believe there always will be a residue of risk.
   b. Ensler’s comment encourages us to think of the mistake as similar to other momentary events in life that have no necessary long-term consequences for shaping our overall identity. Think about this and considers how it changes your ideas about criminality.
   c. The second idea that flows from Ensler’s observation is the way that a structured role and a life-long career flows from the reality of having been convicted of crime. We are used to thinking about how the stringencies of incarceration shape the role and attitudes of a prisoner. Think instead that perhaps the person remains the same as when the mistake happened but that they are given an institutional label or category that is the thing that has reality. This is related to the idea that we should not assume that being a prisoner or in the category of criminal links to identity.

2. I was interested in Pam Smart’s comment that she was not angry when her husband had an affair but just sad. Ensler does not accept that and maybe we would say the same given Smart’s action of having an affair and then playing a role in murder. But I’m interested in what Ensler’s comment says about the nature of emotion.
   a. Was Smart in fact angry even though that was not the feeling she had?
   b. When we have experiences that provoke emotional responses, how do we put those emotions into categories?
   c. Does it make sense to talk about a repertoire or vocabulary of emotions, so that we also can talk about reeducating people so that they have a wider repertoire of emotions and so that they more properly connect affective responses to emotions
      i. so Ensler might be saying that Smart miscategorized her response
      ii. or she might say that her sad response was genuine but that since she also was angry but did not recognize that she has to identify and “use” the emotion of anger in terms of responding to situations

3. It is important to recognize the crime event and what follows as a process so that what is real and true and one moment probably will not be real and true in the same way later.
a. This came up particularly in terms of prisoners “shutting down” emotionally and then blaming themselves intensely for the awful consequences of their crime.
b. A reality is that over time the prisoner’s accept their crime and move on to create a more realistic and satisfying life.
c. The same is true with family members and others in the constellation related to crime.
d. One important consequence of this process idea is that many prisoners change, evolve, and gain a sense of responsibility for the crime and also a greater depth of thought and emotion.
e. Aside from questions of whether this represents rehabilitation, how should be think about this personal emotional, cognitive, and spiritual progress in terms of the way we set up and think about crime and incarceration. The point is that after 10 years in prison it may be important for people to have available the kind of self-development program Ensler offered (whether or not the prisoners ever get out).

4. In the story about the pock mark on the woman’s forehead, I was interested when she said: after my arrest I spent months in prison but it took many more years of being in prison and many more horrible actions on my part to see what lengths I was going to get attention.
   a. The implication is that it also took her this long time to realize that she had been wrong and that she ought to be legal, caring, and honest in life.
   b. You get a similar story about awful behavior and an eventual change of perspective from Eldridge Cleaver in his essay, “On Becoming”.
   c. Probably this kind of cycle of misbehavior, punishment, reflection, and eventual personal change is not just something involving prisoners but also occurs with many of the rest of us.
   d. Does the cycle mean, however, that prison is somehow therapeutic?

5. At some point in the film Ensler says, “crimes are an absolute; most of life is not.”
   a. One aspect I think about in terms of this has to do with responsibility for actions, recognizing that many misbehaviors never are noticed, caught, or punished. When one is caught, it may simply be an official step that is justified and could have happened earlier.
   b. Another aspect is that extreme actions may be similar to other, more ordinary actions. They may have terrible results but this may happen because of momentary bad luck or some other unusual juxtaposition of events that makes the action serious where a similar action, not so affected by these accidental conjunctions would not be serious.
   c. The absolute nature of crime that Ensler refers to is not just about the event but also that it be comes sin and a formal label of evil or badness gets affixed to the person. This is why there is such sharp
juxtaposition with a rehabilitative approach, one that emphasizes atonement where the emphasis is on the possibility of transcendence and the malleability of bad events.