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REVIEW

Timothy Rayner, *Foucault's Heidegger: Philosophy and Transformative Experience* (New York: Continuum, 2007), ISBN 978-0-8264-9486-3.

Timothy Rayner has written an important book on a topic that has not been explored in great depth thus far: the profound impact of Martin Heidegger on Foucault's thinking over the course of more than thirty years, from the early 1950's to his death in 1984. Rayner's point of departure is Foucault's own claim, in his final interview, "The Return of Morality," that: "For me Heidegger has always been the essential philosopher." Rayner takes Foucault at his word here and proceeds to defend a provocative, but compelling hypothesis, "that, in the course of his career, Foucault appropriated, modified and began to articulate a quasi-Heideggerian transformative philosophical practice." (p. 35) Before elaborating on this hypothesis, it is important to point out that Rayner has already told his readers that his approach "does not centrally involve comparing and contrasting Foucault and Heidegger's work," with the risk that such an approach entails of providing "a reductively Heideggerian (and thus misrepresentative) reading of Foucault" (p. 5) Instead, intending his title quite literally, Rayner is determined to focus on *Foucault's Heidegger*, the Heidegger that Foucault probably read; the Heidegger that he claims shaped the Foucauldian project through all its turns. That means that a great deal of Heidegger's writings, unpublished during Foucault's lifetime, especially the lecture courses, including all of the courses given by the early Heidegger at Freiburg from 1919-1923, as well as the manuscripts from the mid-1930's to 1945, are excluded, even where their analysis would shed light on Foucault's own project and understanding of philosophy, inasmuch as they were not part of Foucault's Heidegger. However, the result of that focus is a compelling portrait of the philosophical trajectory of Michel Foucault, and the genealogy of his conceptual toolbox.

What then is this "transformative philosophical practice," which Rayner claims links Foucault to Heidegger? Indeed, in what sense can one even designate Foucault as a *philosopher*? According to Rayner, at the very outset of his career, Foucault sought to distinguish his own project from the philosophical tradition of phenomenology. Whereas the philosophical tradition of which phenomenology is exemplary focused its gaze on some facet of lived experience in order to grasp its

meaning, another philosophical tradition, one linked to Nietzsche or Blanchot, for example, focused on how experience could itself be transformative, on how experience could be implicated in a project of desubjectivation. Rayner situates the Heidegger of *Being and Time* “within the phenomenological tradition that Foucault claims he has sought to avoid. Later Heidegger—the philosopher of *Ereignis*, the critic of modern technology and the advocate of a turn (*Kehre*) in thinking—is at least intuitively aligned with the style of desubjectifying post-philosophy that Foucault has sought to engage.” (pp. 2-3) While I have significant reservations about such a periodization of Heidegger’s thinking, especially in light of the publication of the writings of the early Heidegger, on the way to *Being and Time*, in terms of Foucault’s Heidegger, such a demarcation is perhaps reasonable. Rayner then sees Heidegger’s thinking evolving “from a phenomenological critique of subjectivity into a radical ‘other’ thinking,” one that is “a more or less codified practice specifically intended to transform the experience of being.” (p. 12) Heidegger’s philosophical *practice*, so understood, is seen by Rayner as “the key to understanding Foucault’s conception of philosophy as a vehicle of transformation. This ... is why Foucault cites Heidegger as his essential philosopher in his final interview.” (p. 36) And that is the case, whether Foucault at the moment is focusing on knowledge and truth, on power, or on ethics, on the relation of self to self, the *rapport à soi*.

Within an overall perspective that sees the historical transformations in games of truth, power relations, and modes of subjectivity, as having their bases in *events*, thereby “transforming their status from universals to particulars within a volatile history of struggles for power” (pp. 74), I want to specifically address aspects of Rayner’s treatment of knowledge/truth, power, and ethics that seem to me to be both illustrative of his method, and to raise interesting issues of interpretation.

Foucault’s understanding of philosophy as a transformative experience is concretized in the kinds of books that he writes, what he designates as *experience books*, works of *ficto-criticism*. According to Rayner, “... experience books have the function of transforming the subject in relation to truth;” “... the objective of the experience book is to open a radical perspective on the history of truth that transforms the experience of being.” (p. 60) In contrast to “demonstration books,” which seek veridical “truth,” Foucault’s experience books are examples of *ficto-criticism*, which aim “to construct—or at least facilitate the construction of—a *ficto-critical anti-world*” (p. 66), one in which established truths, and modalities for arriving at truth, deeply embedded power relations, and long instantiated subjectivities, can all be transgressed.

In situating forms of true knowledge within a context of historical events, Rayner discusses the influence of Heidegger on Foucault in terms of the latter’s distinction between two forms of knowledge: *savoir* and *connaissance*, with the latter referring to subject-object relations, and the “specific forms of intentional knowledge” (p. 70) and the rules that govern it. Yet given Rayner’s concern with Foucault’s Hei-

degger, something seems to be missing here. Is there not perhaps a link between *connaissance* and *savoir* and the distinction that Heidegger makes in *Being and Time* between understanding beings as “present-at-hand” [*Vorhanden*] and “ready-to-hand” [*Zuhanden*], with the latter, our pre-ontological understanding of the “envi-roning world” or “work world” [the *Umwelt*], corresponding to *savoir*, as in *savoir-faire*? While Foucault acknowledged that he had not made a detailed study of *Being and Time*, it is likely that in the early ‘50’s he would have been struck by Heidegger’s important distinction between our knowledge of a world of objects and that of our work-world.

Though somewhat skeptical—and perhaps not without good reason—of the expansiveness of Hubert Dreyfus’s claim that power for Foucault plays the same role that being plays for Heidegger, Rayner convincingly shows how both thinkers construe modern techno-power as objectifying, organizing, and managing the real, thereby permitting “a heightened measure of mastery and control over object-domains,” and how both “situate all forms of [modern] life within a domain of technical manipulation. (p. 100). Rayner situates Foucault’s vision of biopower, and the management of a whole population, within a world in which rationalities and technologies “render collective bodies knowable and controllable.” (p. 96) However, when he discusses contemporary neo-liberalism, which he acknowledges to be a variety of biopolitics, Rayner tells us that “liberal technologies of government work to create self-directing, entrepreneurial subjects” (p. 108), thereby, in my view, obscuring what Gilles Deleuze saw as another dimension of biopolitics, its instantiation in the form of a *control* society, in which the space for the elaboration of technologies of the self was restricted by the imposition of new and more effective mechanisms of control.

It is with his ethical turn, around 1980, that Foucault’s confrontation with Heidegger assumes its most dramatic form, according to Rayner. In a series of provocative and, indeed, scintillating moves, Rayner demonstrates how Foucault’s Heidegger came to assume an ever-increasing importance in the French thinker’s elaboration of the themes of critique, subjectivity and desubjectivation, “spirituality,” and problematization.

Foucault’s concept of critique is linked to his reading of Kant, not the Kant of the analytics of truth, of “the formal conditions under which true knowledge is possible” (p. 135), but the Kant of “What is Enlightenment?” who sought an exit from the immaturity of subjection to authority. Critique, for Foucault, then, is tied to desubjugation and desubjectivation, escaping from the prevailing modes of subjectivity, precisely what Heidegger’s other thinking and his vision of *Ereignis* entail. Indeed, the final Foucault’s preoccupation with the subject is no return to some kind of philosophical anthropology, inasmuch as he is clear that he is not speaking of a “substantive subject,” an a-historical or constitutive subject. Rayner claims—and his claim is a powerful one—that his “interpretation enables us to see how, in Foucault’s

later years, the quasi-Heideggerian practice that had previously remained in the background of his critical activity moves to the foreground to become the philosophical activity of 'thinking otherwise' by getting free of, or 'disassembling', the self." (p. 142) That mode of philosophical activity, in which access to the truth entails a process of self-transformation is what the final Foucault designates as "spirituality," in contrast to the philosophical tradition that has shaped the modern West, that is based on self-knowledge and is a hermeneutics of the subject. As Rayner points out, there is another modern tradition, a counter-tradition, that includes Nietzsche, Heidegger, and, of course, Foucault: "Foucault calls this the 'critical ontology of the present and ourselves.' This second tradition, Foucault maintains, resituates ancient spirituality in a modern context by linking the activity of knowing the present to a transformation in the subject's being." (p. 135) That transformation proceeds through what Foucault terms "problematizations," by which one can "transform everyday difficulties into coherent, problematic experiences" (p. 124) in which the historical crises of our experience in a domain of knowledge, power relations, or self-practices, provoke us to explore new ways of being, an event of thought that Rayner sees "as an ontologically tempered version of Heidegger's concept of *Ereignis*, which is also an event of thought." (p. 125)

Timothy Rayner's *Foucault's Heidegger*, through its thesis that Foucault's search for a transformative practice, for an experience that transgresses the prevailing games of truth, power relations, and modes of subjectivity, is closely linked to Heidegger's own philosophical project and constitutes a link in a chain of thinking that seeks to construct a viable anti-world.

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