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REVIEW

Marc Djaballah, *Kant, Foucault, and Forms of Experience* (London: Routledge, 2008), ISBN: 978-0415956246

Under the easy *dictum* of making Kant the “enemy” in twentieth-century French philosophy, it may still come as a surprise to find in Foucault’s work deep structural similarities to the philosophy of Immanuel Kant.¹ In his newly published book, Marc Djaballah aims at revealing the extent to which these two thinkers interlock at a formal level. By developing further the Foucaultian concept of a distinct *attitude* of thought present in Kant, Djaballah subverts the often invoked and expedient way of understanding Kant that splits his philosophy into the salvageable *idea* of criticism and the outdated and hence disposable *doctrine of science* and *system* from which the latter arises; it is this conceptual move that opens up for Djaballah a single analytical space to expose in Foucault’s work a nuanced underlying indebtedness to and parallelism with Kant’s thought. Indeed, according to Djaballah’s main argument, the same Kantian *practice of criticism* is operative not only in Foucault’s reading of Kant, but also and most importantly for his thesis, in the very *form* of Foucault’s analysis of history.

Setting aside current problems in Kantian scholarship as well as historical and philological issues, Djaballah identifies the “guiding thread of Kant’s enigmatic response to the problem of criticism”: that order and regularity in experience can be accounted for “in terms of *a priori* formal conditions that determine what can be cognized.” (30-31) This thread weaves together the five elements that Djaballah argues are both the faces and the regulative contours of what it means to speak of an attitude or “practice of criticism in the theoretical domain.” (30-31) He categorizes these as follows: i) the capacity to abstract; ii) the need for the exercise of skepticism; iii) a functional understanding of the capacities of thought; iv) the submersion of

¹ See Translators’ Introduction to *Kant’s Critical Philosophy: The Doctrine of the Faculties*, Deleuze’s early book on Kant, for a reference to Deleuze’s characterization of the book: “I wrote it as a book on an enemy.” Translated by Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Habberjam (MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1985).

experience in thought; and v) the distinction between real and logical possibility as a background to the definition of the aim of philosophy.

The first chapter of the book contains a detailed account of these five constitutive and regulative elements of a practice of criticism that Djaballah finds decisive for Kant's thought. He successfully avoids detours into minute interpretative polemics while at the same time showing an exceptional depth and breadth of scholarship as he construes his argument for a distinctly Kantian critical attitude of thought by reference to a diverse array of sources beyond the major *Critiques* and the prize essay "Was ist Aufklärung?" His references include pre-critical work, correspondences, lectures and other essays such as Kant's famous response to Eberhard and his never finished "Welches sind die wirklichen Fortschritte..." The most important secondary referent is Deleuze's *La philosophie critique de Kant*, specifically in relation to the latter's analysis of Kant's theory of the capacities of thought.

Having established his interpretation of Kant in Chapter 1, Djaballah dedicates the rest of his study to showing the extent to which these five elements are identifiable in Foucault's historical analysis. In one of the statements that elaborate on this transition, he writes:

In his analysis of discursive practices, Foucault revives this movement of reasoning, and integrates it into a historical frame of reference, not in relation to objective experience as such, but in relation to historically and culturally local practices and the forms of experience they deploy. The following exposition of Foucault's conceptual practice shows how this transposition of Kantian criticism allows his studies to determine forms of experience in history, and their respective possible objects, the field of statements that appear as candidates of truth-or-falsity. (91)

The first such transposition is discussed in Chapter 2, entitled "Nietzsche and the Critical Need to Wake Up." In this chapter, Djaballah argues that Foucault's practice of criticism shares with Kant's a "need for skeptical arousal." (92) Foucault's version, however, is presented as containing a significant Nietzschean component. To make his case, the author dedicates a substantial part of the chapter to a reading of Nietzsche's own texts. Two of the central ideas discussed in this section are Nietzsche's understanding of any philosophical production as always already containing a personal aspect of the person who generates it and of knowledge as an invention, an essentially violent ordering of the world and a source of security that acquires value through a process of habituation. With this conceptual orientation, Djaballah then continues with the main thrust of the chapter.

A salient conceptual thread in Chapter 2 is Djaballah's argument that there is a formal similarity between Kant's antinomical moment in criticism — which he shows coincides in its theoretical significance with Kant's awakening from the dogmatic slumber by his confrontation with Hume's skepticism — and what Foucault takes to be the aim of thought and the *goal* of the various textual devices used in his historical work. (149) The aim entails a new understanding of the practice of philosophy as experimentation and the goal is the inauguration of a "thinking otherwise" by way of experiments embodied in his archaeological or genealogical work and the use of literature, as in his reference to Borges' Chinese Encyclopedia in *Les mots et les choses*. These experiments are the source of shock and self-estrangement in relation to what otherwise appear as naturalized regimes in epistemology, relations of power, and understanding of the self operative within the present historical moment.

In Chapter 3, Djaballah pursues further the topic of the aim of Foucault's practice of criticism. He argues that the most important motivational and constitutive principle of Foucault's practice entails a movement from a kind of criticism defined in terms of *the finitude of human reason* (Kant) to one in terms of *the historical contingency of rationality*. (195) In his account, Djaballah discusses, first, Foucault's interpretation of the epistemological role of Kant in *Le mots et les choses* and his conceptualization of a model of philosophical thinking in "Qu'est-ce que les Lumières?" in order to show points of convergence between the two authors. And second, he discusses in what ways both thinkers are concerned with *limits*. He argues that despite Foucault's introduction of historical contingency, they share the same understanding of the function of rationality within forms of experience. But most interestingly, he identifies two distinctly Foucaultian elements in the practice of criticism also relating to limits. First, there is a "deliberate theoretical *restraint*" in methodology by giving "no principled priority in the relation between the historical and the theoretical," thus creating what he calls a "theoretical instability" in his critical attitude. And, second, there is a constant endeavor through "experimentation" to go beyond the limits of thought, that is, to "think otherwise." (201)

Having already brought into the fold the concept of "form of experience," Djaballah makes this the locus of Chapter 4. His argument for this transposition revolves around his analysis of the Foucaultian concepts of practice, discourse, and the historical *a priori* as corresponding to the Kantian concepts of form of experience, spontaneity, and receptivity. By limiting the correspondence to the function that these concepts play within their respective works, he accommodates the diachronic element in Foucault's theory as well as the fact that his analysis is retroactive (of past forms of experiences, but not of the form of experience in general). (222) This chapter is the most Foucaultian in that the original and distinct characteristics of his work are brought to the fore.

It is possible to point out that some of the five facets and regulative segments introduced by Djaballah as woven through Kant's solution to his critical problem are not unique to Kant, and thus that the very underlying *raison d'être* of Djaballah's project is undermined. This is a criticism raised by Oksala in her review of the text, in particular with respect to the skeptical moment that Djaballah argues is shared by Kant and Foucault; she rightly points out that variations of it are also found, for instance, in the works of Descartes, Wittgenstein and Merleau-Ponty.² Thus, one asks: *Why Kant?* Despite this observation, however, it is important to keep in mind that Djaballah is not arguing that any one of these cannot be found elsewhere, but that *all* five are essential characteristics of Kant's critical way of theorizing and that precisely these five are also found working together, renewed by the demands of a new historical epoch, within Foucault's theoretical orientation. Moreover, if one takes into account the *specter* of Kant throughout all stages of Foucault's work, something that Djaballah establishes convincingly and is becoming ever more apparent thanks to new publications on the subject, then it becomes harder to claim that these parallels in the form of practicing criticism is mere coincidence.

What is at stake for any reader of Djaballah's study is to determine, first, if he accurately identifies the relevant elements in Kant's critical attitude. In other words, are what he extracts from Kant's work as formal elements of his thinking Kantian enough? And, following this, to consider whether he sufficiently transposes these elements, while retaining the specificity of Foucault's diachronic and practice-centered approach, to accept the claim that they share in the same form of criticism. The arguments are too complex and nuanced to carry out such an evaluation here. However, with a wealth of textual evidence and incisive interpretations of the work of all of the figures, the author makes a very compelling case for both of these.

The text is not always easy reading because of a writing style characterized at times by unnecessary complex sentence structures, repetitions and analytic detours that, albeit extremely interesting, obscure the main points at hand—likely the result of working with the disparate styles of those about whom he is writing. Aside from this minor note, Djaballah's *Kant, Foucault and the Forms of Experience* is undoubtedly a major contribution to Foucault studies as a whole. The author's approach is also an invitation to reevaluate the role Kant's work played in twentieth-century French philosophy and an opportunity for the reader to reconsider the resources available within it. Finally, for those of us who have been involved for some time now in research that focuses on Foucault's Kantianism, it is an exciting work that does a

² Johanna Oksala, "Kant, Foucault, and the Forms of Experience," *Notre Dame Philosophical Review*, (January 28, 2009), <http://ndpr.nd.edu/review.cfm?id=15127>

wonderful job of extending our interpretative road maps. It sets a standard that will be hard to match.

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