

# Foucault Studies

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## REVIEW

**C.G. Prado (ed.), *Foucault's Legacy* (London: Continuum International, 2009), ISBN: 978-1847065957**

How are we to assess the legacy of Foucault's work now that a quarter-century has passed since his untimely death? To this end there are certainly many available and potentially fruitful paths to take. We may, for example, reconsider the reputation that Foucault enjoyed during his lifetime. Or, we may look at the ways in which he still serves as a provocative interlocutor for scholars today. More still, we may wish to survey the broad impact that Foucault's work has had on a variety of disciplines within the human sciences, or choose to remain focused on the influence that he has had on thinkers that are likely to be thought of as belonging directly to Foucault's cultural and methodological tradition. In several respects, *Foucault's Legacy* takes a stroll down each of these paths. But the book's most important achievement, I believe, is that the eight essays contained in it also clear some new paths for assessing Foucault's legacy. In this way, the book serves as an initiation into new and diverse conversations *with* Foucault by bringing new and diverse questions and theoretical lenses to bear on the interpretation of Foucault's work, as well as putting him into dialogue with thinkers who are usually not thought of as potential interlocutors. Such tasks are fraught with risk, and some of the essays meet the challenge more successfully than others. But taken as a whole, this is a welcome and refreshing contribution to Foucault scholarship, a contribution that just might succeed also at reaching beyond its immediate achievement by developing and sustaining the new and diverse conversations that it inaugurates.

As C.G. Prado rightly reminds readers in his editorial "Introduction," the major difficulty in assessing Foucault's legacy is his enigmatic nature, as reflected in Foucault's intended objective so as to write "in order to have no face," along with his warning to those who may well wish to assess his legacy in the future: "Do not ask who I am and do not ask me to remain the same: leave it to our bureaucrats and our police to see that our papers are in order."<sup>1</sup> And because Foucault lived up to his promise, and because scholars inevitably demand of Foucault's work that it reflect and cohere to a unifying theme or principle, we end up with a multiplicity of Foucaults, so that, as Prado puts it, "Foucault is all things to all people." (2) To this Prado adds that because "there is no single work or theme that adequately represents the

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<sup>1</sup> Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, trans. A.M. Sheridan Smith (New York: Pantheon Books, 1972), 17.

complex, variegated, and evolutionary totality of Foucault's thought and its several shifts in direction," Foucault's work "resists holistic interpretation." (3) Hence the appropriateness of the manner of reflecting on Foucault's legacy found in this book: because Foucault's work comes to us as "innovative, enigmatic, and challenging" (3) so too should the effort be to assess that legacy by entering into new and diverse conversations with Foucault.

Most likely due to the small number of essays in *Foucault's Legacy*, the book is not divided into sections or arranged according to clearly articulated themes, chronological categories, or problems. This is not to suggest, however, that the essays stand in isolation from each other (for example, the final two essays by Michael Lackey and James Bernauer make a fine couple in that both engage Foucault with questions of religion and secularization), but rather that they remain strong in standing alone. Still, this structure — or, better yet, this lack of structure — supports the overall experience of encountering new ideas with the reading of each new essay. Going through each essay, the reader is bound to get a sense of movement but not necessarily the sense of ordered development. This leads me to wonder how *Foucault's Legacy* might work best pedagogically, for it is not easy to see how all or even a majority of the essays might be made accessible in a classroom setting, unless the objective was to initiate students into the diversity of ways of conversing and "thinking along" (3) with Foucault.

The first chapter in this collection is David Couzens Hoy's, "The Temporality of Power," which challenges the dominant view that Foucault's analysis of power is rooted primarily either in his concern with "materiality" (i.e., concepts of life and death via bio-power) or his concern with "ideality" (i.e., the priority of the inner-life and subjectivity via disciplinary power). This dominant view has led, Hoy suggests, to the assumption that Foucault is primarily a spatial thinker—consider, for example, the preoccupations with architecture, visibility, and the body, in *Discipline and Punish*. To this, Hoy argues, that for Foucault "the key to punishment in the penitentiary is not so much the architecture as the daily *schedule*" and that "the carceral is fundamentally a matter of 'doing time.'" (9, emphases in original) Hoy then demonstrates how Foucault's thinking about power is "concerned with temporality throughout" (10) in two ways: first, by analyzing Foucault's methodological approaches to the study of power; second, by analyzing the various manifestations of power that Foucault describes. In the first case, depending on which methodological approach Foucault takes up—whether archaeology or genealogy—we will see Foucault relating to the present in two distinct ways: as archaeologist, Foucault "cautions against attributing too much importance to any given present"; as genealogist, Foucault points to the "transformative possibilities that can only be found in the present." (11) The main idea here is that everything seems to turn, at least methodologically for Foucault, on the attention that is paid to the temporal over the spatial. In the second instance, much turns also on the attention Foucault gives to the temporal in his descriptions of sovereign, disciplinary, and bio-power respectively. Whereas the sovereign model of power seeks its justification by turning to the past and its origins, the disciplinary model of power seeks to "form present habits that will determine what people do in the future." (12) And, in contrast to disciplinary power, bio-power looks toward an uncertain future that it seeks to control "by regulation that anticipates probabilistically rather

than by deterministic mechanisms that operate on individual bodies." (12) The upshot of these demonstrations, aside from the central point concerning the temporal character of Foucault's thought, is that genealogy as a critical "history of the present" is Foucault's most important legacy.

The next essay, "A Philosophical Shock: Foucault Reading Nietzsche, Reading Heidegger," by Babette E. Babich, argues that the tendency to view Foucault's work as either being a continuation of Nietzsche's genealogical project *or* a continuation of Heidegger's formulations of the connections between truth and techno-science, ultimately misconstrues the type of influence that both Nietzsche and Heidegger had on Foucault. We should avoid the exclusive reading of Foucault and Nietzsche together, or of relating Foucault only to Heidegger. Instead, Babich argues, "Foucault's Heidegger can only be understood on Nietzschean terms while at the same time, Foucault's Nietzsche only takes place by way of Heidegger..." (20) The effort that Babich makes to engage all three thinkers throughout makes this both an impressive piece of scholarship and the most conversational essay in the collection.

The next essay by Tom Rockmore, "Foucault, Hegel and the Death of Man," is an equally impressive piece of scholarship, but less conversational than Babich's essay. What Rockmore attempts to do is to draw a relationship between Hegel's role in French philosophy and Foucault's famous thesis concerning the death of man, and then to show how Foucault's thesis is "not anti-Hegelian but Hegelian." (43) In the end, I found that Rockmore's piece reads more like two essays than one, and is followed by a concluding argument designed to show how Foucault's thesis is compatible with Hegel. What Rockmore provides is, first, a history of Hegel studies in France, in which Foucault does not appear. Then, second, a description of Foucault's death of man thesis and its underlying theory of subjectivity in which Hegel does not appear. And though the conclusion and its overall argument are persuasive, it seems cut off from the previous two sections.

Barry Allen's essay, "After Knowledge and Liberty: Foucault and the New Pragmatism," takes up the issue of why there was seemingly such little engagement with Foucault on the part of Richard Rorty, the leading figure of "the new pragmatism," compared to other contemporaries, like Jacques Derrida and Donald Davidson. After all, says Allen, both follow Nietzsche and Heidegger in viewing epistemology as untenable *vis-à-vis* their rejection of the correspondence theory of truth, both are historicists, and both are "ironical about the contingency of things." (68) Allen shows that the reason for Rorty's reticence to working with Foucault is that "Foucault places a strain on Rorty's distinction between public and private." (68) Foucault's descriptions of social institutions (such as the clinic and the penitentiary) render Rorty unsure of what to do insofar as Rorty is committed to those social institutions, or, at least the public that underwrites them. In other words, Foucault "seems to have chosen for his private poetry the assumptions of the public institutions that Rorty most regards." (69)

The next two essays in *Foucault's Legacy* both bring Foucault into conversation with specific philosophers who have rarely been discussed in the arena of Foucault scholarship. Colin

Koopman's essay, "Two Uses of Genealogy: Michel Foucault and Bernard Williams," contrasts Foucault's use of genealogy as "critical problematization" to Williams's approach to genealogy as "normative vindication." Koopman does this by placing both genealogies in the context of the "genetic fallacy" – that is, the charge that genealogy tends to conflate "the past historical development of a practice with the present justification of that practice." (92) Koopman argues that Williams is more vulnerable to this charge than Foucault, and herein resides the difference between their two respective uses of genealogy. Whereas Williams attempts to trace the genealogy of contemporary practices rooted in the concept of truth in order to vindicate truth and the values and norms associated with truth (hence Williams is prone to commit the genetic fallacy), Foucault's genealogical inquiries are absent of any normative ambitions. Rather, Koopman claims, Foucault engages in critical problematization by first inquiring into "the emergence and descent of certain problems and their corollary conceptions of what might count as a solution," and then by showing how "such inquiry functions to clarify and intensify the hybrid network of problems and solutions inquired into." (101) In this way, Foucault's genealogy works first, to show how contemporary practices have become problematic so that we are, second, able to determine the limits and possibilities for action. Unlike Williams, Foucault avoids the genetic fallacy by neither legitimizing nor delegitimizing certain contemporary practices.

Santiago Zabala's offering, "Weakening Ontology through Actuality: Foucault and Vattimo," explores the influence of Foucault on the Italian philosopher, Gianni Vattimo. While Vattimo is not directly concerned with Foucault in his earlier works, Zabala contends that Foucault's notion of a "historical ontology of ourselves" – which Zabala employs as an "ontology of actuality" – plays a greater role in Vattimo's later writings. In fact, what Zabala attempts to demonstrate is that Vattimo's own ontology, "which consists in weakening the strong structures of reality through interpretation," (110) is the culmination of Foucault's own attempt at a "silent" ontological project.

As mentioned earlier, the final two essays in the collection make for a fine thematic pairing in that both deal with the issues of secularization and religion. Michael Lackey, in his, "Foucault, Secularization Theory, and the Theological Origins of Totalitarianism," recruits Foucault to make the case that Christianity played a foundational role in the formation of the Western political subject of the modern nation-state, and that, contrary to the standard "secularization hypothesis," it is "impossible to understand the origins of totalitarianism and fascism without taking into account a distinctly religious conception of the political subject." (125) Starting from Foucault's anti-fascist comments in the "Preface" of Deleuze's and Guattari's *Anti-Oedipus*, and then moving to remarks Foucault made during the lectures of 1974-1975 at the Collège de France, Lackey builds the case that Foucault understood the modern political subject as an effect not of "de-Christianization," but of "in-depth Christianization."<sup>2</sup> This, of course, is supported by Foucault's description of the intensification of pastoral power through

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<sup>2</sup> Michel Foucault, *Abnormal: Lectures at the Collège de France 1974-1975*, trans. Graham Burchell (New York: Picador Press, 2003), 177.

Christianity's development of techniques for the government of the soul. And though I was persuaded by much of what Lackey had to say, I was left to wonder whether a consideration of Foucault's later lectures, specifically those from 1981-1982 on the "care of the self,"<sup>3</sup> would have softened the charge that Lackey makes. For though it is correct to suggest that Christianity intensified these technologies of the self, which Lackey ultimately ties to the emergence of totalitarianism and fascism, it seems too strong to also suggest that Christianity somehow set this all in motion (141) and that "a distinctly Christian technology of self was central." (142) After all, Foucault's later lectures demonstrate how the distinctively Christian technologies of the self in question were in many ways appropriated from ancient philosophical and spiritual traditions. Would it be possible to conclude, then, that the origins of the modern political subject go further back? Furthermore, is seeking the "origins" of certain modes of subjectivity a project that is conducive to the types of analyses that Foucault engaged in?

Perhaps because of my own scholarly interests, I found the final essay by James Bernauer, "Secular Self-Sacrifice: On Michel Foucault's Courses at the Collège de France," to be the highlight of the collection.<sup>4</sup> Bernauer maps the trajectory of Foucault's lecture career at the Collège de France by looking at how his public research project was integrated into his own ethical-aesthetic project of *rapport à soi*. What Bernauer finds so fascinating is how Foucault's relationship to himself develops and transforms through his years of public teaching. Whereas with the inaugural lecture of 1970 we see Foucault clearly express the desire for anonymity—"I would really like to have slipped imperceptibly into this lecture..."—the final lectures of 1984 deal with the topic of "parrhesia," of open and frank speech in the context of the self's relationship to the self. Bernauer thus poses the question, "Is the distance between this self-obliteration and his later care of the self to be accounted for in the transformation of an isolated writer that was effected by his years of public teaching?" (146) What Bernauer wants to assay, therefore, is to what extent Foucault's "private project" might be considered as having "public significance." If it does, Bernauer suggests, then it does so insofar as it helps us deal with the philosophical problem of self-sacrifice:

There is but one truly philosophical problem, and that is whether we should sacrifice our lives. Judging how a culture of totalized meaning and normalization has defined the worth of our living and dying and how we might critically resist that definition is the fundamental question of philosophy. (157)

In the end, the desire for anonymity and the courage of 'parrhesia' are both responses to the same philosophical problem of self-sacrifice. Foucault's legacy is thus the call to philosophy as

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<sup>3</sup> Michel Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject 1981-1982*, trans. Graham Burchell (New York: Picador Press, 2005).

<sup>4</sup> I, myself, have written on the relationship between various modes of self-sacrifice and Foucault's development of "care of the self." See, Darryl De Marzio, "Teaching as Asceticism: Transforming the Self through the Practice," *Philosophy of Education Yearbook 2007*: 349-355; and, Darryl M. De Marzio, "The Teacher's Gift of Sacrifice as the Art of the Self," *Philosophy of Education Yearbook 2009*: 166-73.

the aesthetics of existence—not as the call to live or to die in the face of existential meaninglessness, but to make something beautiful of our lives in the face of totalized meaningfulness.

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