

# Foucault Studies

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ISSN: 1832-5203

*Foucault Studies*, No. 22, pp. 263-268, January 2017

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## BOOK REVIEW

**Stuart Elden, *Foucault's Last Decade* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2016), 272pp, pb £17.99, ISBN: 9780745683928**

Recent scholarship on the work of Michel Foucault has been significantly influenced by his 1970-1984 Collège de France lecture courses that started being published in 1997, culminating in the publication of all the thirteen courses by 2015. Although it can never supplant the monographs, the material of these lecture courses informs how Foucault's works are to be approached, particularly the three volumes that make up *The History of Sexuality* series. Stuart Elden's *Foucault's Last Decade*, which he describes as "a book about a book, a history of the *History of Sexuality*" (5), is a masterly intervention in this regard. Elden argues that Foucault's last decade is characterised by a "long-standing interest in the question of confession" (204), and that this question must be foregrounded if one wants to properly understand the multiple shifts and apparent digressions in *The History of Sexuality* series, a project which occupied and preoccupied Foucault throughout his last decade. Elden shows how this privileging of the question of confession in Foucault's work brings out the unsuitability of "the older reading that the subject 'returns' in Foucault's late work" (205). The approach to Foucault's work in this book also counters the commonplace periodisations and divisions of Foucault's work, showing how rather than swift breaks from archaeology to genealogy, or from power to ethics, Foucault's work is marked by more interesting and nuanced progressions.

In Chapter 1 and Chapter 2, Elden provides an outline of key topics which Foucault discussed in his 1974 and 1975 lecture courses, *Psychiatric Power* and *Abnormal*. Elden translates the title of the latter course as *The Abnormals*, which, although a closer rendering of the original title, *Les Anormaux*, would have benefited from a note explaining the different rendering of the title to avoid confusion given that the English translation of the lecture course was published as *Abnormal*. This outline serves to show how in these lecture courses, especially *Abnormal*, one can find clues on the kind of analysis which Foucault might have followed had he proceeded with his original plan for *The History of Sexuality* series.

Chapter 3 is a strong chapter. Elden presents Foucault's arguments in *The Will to Knowledge*, the first volume of *The History of Sexuality*, on the proliferation of discourses of sexuality, the disposi-

tif of sexuality, *scientia sexualis* and the cautionary prescriptions Foucault proposes regarding analyses of power. Although well-rehearsed in the literature, Elden's presentation of these arguments and concepts is very informative and clearly presented. The chapter proceeds by considering how advanced Foucault was in the writing of the subsequent five volumes of the original plan for *The History of Sexuality*, of which Foucault famously published none. Elden claims that Foucault "had much of the work of the subsequent volumes sketched out to various degrees of completeness" (64), and his consideration of what the projected volumes might have included is a useful discussion that sheds light on how *The History of Sexuality* series would have turned out had Foucault followed his original plan. It seems that, most certainly, Foucault had abandoned his original plan as early as 1976, the year in which the first volume was published. Elden refers to how Foucault confided to his partner Daniel Defert that he did not intend to write the subsequent volumes (70), and how in several interviews Foucault conceded that he will not complete the five projected volumes in the way he had promised (79-81).

Of particular interest in this chapter is Elden's reference to other studies announced by Foucault as separate from *The History of Sexuality* series, some of which were published while others remained incomplete. Elden refers to how Foucault's essay "Lives of Infamous Men" was intended as an "introduction to a work to appear, under the same title, in the collection 'Le Chemin'" (69). This work eventually appeared as *Le Désordre de familles*, co-edited with Arlette Farge in 1982 in the series *Archives* published by Gallimard, with an English translation to appear soon. For another series, *Parallel Lives*, Foucault edited the *Herculine Barbin* memoir in 1978. His interest in hermaphrodites, seen also in the 1975 *Abnormal* lecture course, led Foucault to consider publishing an additional volume or an anthology on hermaphrodites which, however, never came to fruition (65-66). Elden also refers to another book Foucault was working on after the publication of *Discipline and Punish*. This book was concerned with the role of psychiatric expertise in matters of criminal justice, both from a historical perspective as well as in relation to contemporary events (69). In *La Volonté de savoir*, Foucault also announces a separate study on the relation between torture and confession which he intended to publish as *Pouvoir de la vérité*, reference to which is not included in the English translation (69).

Work on the volumes in the original plan for *The History of Sexuality* series forced Foucault to reconsider when, where, and how to publish the material he was working on. But no volume caused him to reconsider his whole plan for the series on sexuality more than the projected second volume, *La Chair et le corps*. Elden considers Foucault's original plan for this volume, and how this plan came to be disrupted, particularly because of the question of confession. One of the merits of *Foucault's Last Decade* is the analysis of the different instances in which Foucault engaged with the question of confession. Elden traces Foucault's interest in this question to his first two lecture courses, particularly *Théories et institutions pénales*, as well as in *Psychiatric Power*, *Abnormal* and *Discipline and Punish*. Foucault considered confession to be a key theme in *The Will to Knowledge* too. Elden refers to a conversation where Claude Mauriac tells Foucault that he does not completely agree with what he has written on confession. Foucault's response to this was: "But it is the heart of the book!" (75) Elden notes that Foucault was not satisfied with the material

he was compiling on confession in the Middle Ages, particularly because “of the more sweeping claims [that] may not have been sustainable on more detailed examination,” and Foucault’s reliance “on relatively few sources, and primarily secondary accounts” (77). In August 1977, Foucault revised his manuscript of the projected book on confession by working on the early Church Fathers, and this line of research occupied him throughout the subsequent years.

In chapter 4, Elden outlines Foucault’s 1978 and 1979 governmentality lectures, *Security, Territory, Population* and *The Birth of Biopolitics*, and considers the collaborative projects which he enthusiastically sought aside from the public lecture course, the public and performative nature of which he was growing unhappy with (82). These projects include Foucault’s work on hospitals in *Généalogie des équipements collectifs* and work on the politics of habitat and green spaces. These sections in Elden’s book present avenues for research on aspects of Foucault’s work which are less popular and could be explored further.

Chapter 5 is another rich chapter in which Elden considers Foucault’s revised interest in the question of confession in early 1980, which now drew on sources that were not extensively considered in his earlier work, especially early Christian texts. This chapter deals with Foucault’s 1979-80 lecture course, *On the Government of the Living* which, Elden argues, “can be seen as the third of Foucault’s courses on ‘governmentality’” (112), as well as the 1980 lectures on the beginning of the hermeneutics of the self he delivered in Berkeley and Dartmouth College, and *Wrong-Doing, Truth-Telling*, the 1981 series of lectures he gave in Louvain. Elden notes how through these lectures, one gets a glimpse of how Foucault might have presented the volume on Christianity, which he now renamed *Les Aveux de la chair*, at that time that is, starting with a discussion of the pagan obligation to know oneself in antiquity is radically transformed by an early Christian, monastic obligation to confess one’s thoughts to a superior (127). In fact, Elden notes that “a draft of *Les Aveux de la chair* was completed around this time” (133). The reason for not publishing it around 1981 was because “Foucault remained unhappy with the introductory material to this volume, which he says discussed antiquity” (133). This explains why all of Foucault’s subsequent lecture courses dealt with antiquity. At the time of his death, he was in a position to publish the material on antiquity and was almost ready to publish the book on Christianity.

Chapter 6 considers Foucault’s 1980-81 lecture course, *Subjectivity and Truth*, including a discussion of Artemidorus’ analysis of the interpretation of dreams in *Oneirocritica*, the status of marriage in ancient Greek, Roman and early Christian texts, the arts of life or aesthetics of existence, and a discussion of aphrodisia. Elden then moves on to discuss Foucault’s 1981-82 lecture course, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject*, and the 1982 lectures in Toronto and Vermont on technologies of the self. In this chapter, Elden provides a clear exposition of Foucault’s ideas in these lectures, namely on the dialogue *Alcibiades, askēsis*, and the historical variations in the practice and conception of care of the self and techniques of life in ancient Greece, Stoicism and Christianity. Of particular interest is that Foucault introduces his analysis of *parrēsia* in *The Hermeneutics of the Subject*,

further highlighting continuity in how Foucault's project developed from his interwoven interests in power relations, the history of sexuality, practices of confession, technologies of the self and risky truth-telling. Elden also refers to another book derived from these lectures and seminars, concerning practices of the self and linking ethics and politics, which Foucault intended to publish as *Le gouvernement de soi et des autres* (162).

In chapter 7, Elden considers how Foucault's extensive engagement with antiquity resulted in a significant transformation of the order in which he will present the volumes of *The History of Sexuality*. Although initially intended as introductory material to the book on Christianity, his research on antiquity prompted the inclusion of a volume that focused specifically on antiquity. Foucault had a draft of this volume, which he titled *L'Usage des plaisirs*, by March 1983. This draft was intended to be published as the second volume in the revised plan for *The History of Sexuality* series, and so, according to Foucault's plan in early 1983, *L'Usage des plaisirs* would be the book on antiquity that precedes *Les Aveux de la chair*, which was now intended as the third volume. At this time, Foucault also conceived of another book, on ancient practices of the self, which he planned to publish aside from *The History of Sexuality* series with the title of *Le Souci de soi*. As we know, this is the title of the third volume of *The History of Sexuality* that was actually published. This happened because, as Elden explains, Foucault had yet again changed his mind on how the volumes will be presented. In August 1983, Foucault decided to divide the manuscript of *L'Usage des plaisirs* into two volumes, retaining the title for the second volume, naming the third volume *Le Souci de soi*, and planning to publish *Les Aveux de la chair* as the fourth volume. Although this is the order which he actually went with, Elden notes that Foucault had "to be persuaded that this was the best plan, instead of the publication of *Les Aveux de la chair* first or all three parts together in a single volume" (171). After getting *The Use of Pleasure* and *The Care of the Self* published, Foucault once again turned to work on the book on Christianity, amidst his deteriorating health. Less than a month before his death, he thought he had "one or two months' work left to do, expecting publication in October" (189). Elden contends that "[w]hile *Les Aveux de la chair* is likely to be published eventually, for now it remains something of a holy grail for Foucault scholars" (190). For Elden, this book "is one of a constant deferral: this is the book that Foucault never published" (189). Nonetheless, he holds that given how this book motivated several shifts in the overall project on sexuality, it "may well be the key to the whole *History of Sexuality* series" (78).

In Chapter 8, Elden provides a brief, if schematic, exposition of Foucault's final two lecture courses, *The Government of the Self and Others* in 1983 and *The Courage of the Truth* in 1984, foregrounding Foucault's discussion of *parrësia*. As Elden writes of his book, "[t]he book does not have a conclusion" (7), and it ends with a summary of the extensive research Foucault conducted in his last decade, highlighting the continuities in his research questions as well as the transformations these underwent. Moreover, Elden notes how, in the same way that the publication of Foucault's lecture courses has transformed Foucault scholarship, so too can the as of yet unpublished and inaccessible material – from the thousands of pages of Foucault material sold to the Bibliothèque Na-

tionale, lecture courses other than the Collège de France series that are presently being made available, and the manuscript of *Les Aveux de la chair* – continue to transform interpretations of and approaches to Foucault's works (208).

*Foucault's Last Decade* has various merits. It is cogently argued: Elden's contention that the question of confession is key to understanding the transformations that *The History of Sexuality* underwent is convincing. It is extensively researched: Elden's eye for detail and accuracy is painstaking but never pedantic. Indeed, the book contains various references to sources which are familiar and to others that were unearthed and compiled by Elden as "The Uncollected Foucault" in *Foucault Studies*. The major contribution of this book is its well-informed study of the history of *The History of Sexuality* in Foucault's last decade, which Elden does excellently by considering together the books Foucault actually published, his various lecture courses and interviews, and biographical details. Regarding the latter, Elden claims that Foucault's "wider life is discussed only in relation to how it impacts on his work." (5) In so doing, Elden avoids the pitfalls of implausible speculations drawn out of Foucault's private life. The book exhibits the virtues of meticulous and careful scholarship in their richness.

Elden presents his book as "a book about Foucault, not about Foucauldians; a contribution to, and not a book about, Foucault studies" (5), and regards the book as "a detailed intellectual history" (1) of *The History of Sexuality*. Nonetheless, in particular sections, a more thorough theoretical engagement would have been welcome. Whereas the question of confession in Foucault's work is excellently and extensively dealt with, other topics – such as Foucault's account of ethics and *parrēsia* – are treated in a more expository and descriptive way. An added contribution that the book could have made is through a consideration of the literature that deals with Foucault's work on ethics. Moreover, a closer analysis of *parrēsia* could have considered how Foucault's discussion of this notion relates to his engagement with the question of confession or whether it introduced a new dynamic to Foucault's discussion of truth-telling. This would have contributed further to the argument Elden makes regarding the continuities in Foucault's research throughout his last decade.

Of the multiple shifts that came to characterise his writing of *The History of Sexuality* volumes, Foucault wrote:

I reflected that, after all, it was best to sacrifice a definite program to a promising line of approach. I also reminded myself that it would probably not be worth the trouble of making books if they failed to teach the author something he had not known before, if they did not lead to unforeseen places, and if they did not disperse one toward a strange and new relation with himself. The pain and pleasure of the book is to be an experience.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Michel Foucault, "Preface to *The History of Sexuality*, Volume Two", in *Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth: The Essential Works of Foucault 1954-1984 Volume 1*, edited by Paul Rabinow, translated by Robert Hurley et al. (New York: The New Press, 1997), 204-205.

This is the most accurate explanation of the multiple transformations that Foucault's *The History of Sexuality* underwent, which Elden captures in its fullness. In Foucauldian fashion, Elden's plan for *Foucault's Last Decade* surpassed his initial intentions. What started off as a book intended to account for Foucault's last decade ended up producing also a separate book-length study that will be published in 2017 as *Foucault: The Birth of Power*. This book will serve both as a precursor to *Foucault's Last Decade* and as an independent study of the emergence of *Discipline and Punish*. It promises to complement this present book in quality, depth and brilliance.

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