Foucault Studies

BOOK REVIEW

Bruce Moghtader, *Foucault and Educational Ethics* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016) ISBN 978-1-137-57495-4

Bruce Moghtader's first book, *Foucault and Educational Ethics* (2015), is both accessible and informative, providing an in-depth analysis of Foucault's ethics of self-constitution, and its application to current educational studies. Moghtader discusses at length the lesser-read later works of Foucault on Greco-Roman aesthetics of living, *The Use of Pleasure* (1984) and *The Care of the Self* (1984), and examines his earlier work through their lenses, resulting in a discussion of what a subjective-based ethics without imperatives might entail. The outcome of this atypical approach is a refreshing take on Foucault's academic career and personal politics. Looking to Foucault's work on self- constitution, Moghtader takes on the daunting task of establishing a pedagogical ethics without explicit instructions or value-judgements, and one which is consistent with Foucault's warnings of the connection between knowledge and power. Moghtader's innovative, yet at times repetitive, discussion of a Foucauldian pedagogy is an excellent read for educational scholars without a background in continental philosophy, and for those interested in a practical application of Foucault's later works. This is not merely a book about how we should teach and learn, but about what exactly teaching and learning are, and the centrality of study to the constitution and care of ourselves as transformative and political subjects. Moghtader finds an ethics in the importance of helping others understand themselves as produced by socio-historical contexts, and in the participation of the subject's own constitution. Moghtader's practical application of Foucauldian ethics is an essential read for anyone looking for an alternative to rule-giving consequentialist and deontological theories in applied ethics.

In Chapter Two, "Methodology and Method," Moghtader suggests Foucault's methodologies, archeology and genealogy can be used in educational ethics as a means of understanding how subjects are produced by political and historical circumstances outside the education system. He further evaluates how power and technologies in these systems act on and constitute subjects. Moghtader's discussion of the influence of Kantian moral anthropology in this chapter is particularly interesting, as it both situates Foucault's ethics in its philosophical context, and further explores the lesser-discussed epistemic aspects of his politics and ethics. However, Moghtader's

claim that "Foucault made philosophy conscious of its methodological limits"[1] (15) fails to acknowledge Foucault's place in a long tradition, which begins with Kant's three *Critiques* in which Kant defines "philosophy," and what can and cannot be done with it methodologically. Moghtader is right that Foucault's methodologies contributed to understandings of the limits of philosophy, but he inherited this task, rather than created it; Moghtader seems to suggest the latter. Moghtader's claim that critical attitudes developed in education systems should not be limited to these methodologies, but apply to all aspects of life, is the central claim of the chapter. That is: to know herself within the educational system, a subject must first understand herself as a subject produced by socio-historical contexts, and knowledge-based political power, and that the methodologies of genealogy and archeology can provide means of self-understanding.

In his third chapter, "Present Educational Ethics," Moghtader directly engages with two of the eminent theorists in contemporary pedagogical literature, and in so doing, inaugurates a move away from traditional responsibility-based ethics into one of self-transformation and care. This chapter begins to sketch out the structure of an applied Foucauldian ethics. Moghtader examines Foucauldian influences in the work of John Dewey and Nel Nodding, and notes what unique contributions Foucault's work could make to current research. Here Moghtader identifies similarities and compatibilities between Foucault and his contemporaries, Dewey and Nodding. Interpreting Dewey, Moghtader notes the subjectivity in his ethics and the inseparability of politics and moral aesthetics as directly in line with Foucault's care of the self. Moghtader argues Dewey fails to recognize the limits of transgression, focusing on experience and subjectivity of the students, rather than on the content of the education. What feminist educational theorist Nodding and Foucault share, Moghtader argues, is an emphasis on relationships and intimacy in ethical living. Nodding's failure, for Moghtader, is in her theory of the formation of the moral self. Nodding's misstep is her attribution of differences between the sexes to something inherent about them, rather than as produced by socio-historical forces and context. Both Dewey and Nodding reject more typical understandings of ethics: Dewey resisting consequentialist logics, and Nodding developing her own feminist ethics; but neither go as far as Foucault into an ethics of the development of the self. Moghtader juxtaposes Foucault, Dewey, and Nodding to show both the influence of a relational, subjective ethics in educational ethics and to indicate where Foucault's transformation-based ethics would be useful to current research. This section both exposes those familiar with continental philosophy to the situation of educational ethics, and grounds Foucault in familiar theories for those readers from pedagogical studies. It reveals how the ethics Foucault offers is distinctive, but also its natural home in the current scholarship of experiential and interpersonal ethics in pedagogical studies.

In Chapter Four, "Archeology and Genealogy", Moghtader departs from his discussion of Foucauldian methodology and care of the self, and its possible application to educational studies, and looks at Foucault's methodologies in the context of his books and politics. Here, Moghtader

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[1] Moghtader, Bruce. Foucault and Educational Ethics. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016. PP. 15.

offers a brief discussion of Foucault's books prior to his reconstruction of Greco-Roman ethics in chronological order (*Madness and Civilization, The Birth of the Clinic,* followed by *The Order of Things,* and *The Archeology of Knowledge,* followed by *Discipline and Punish,* and *The History of Sexuality vol. 1*). Moghtader struggles the most in this chapter. Though his discussions of Foucault's work are succinct and informative, the purpose of their inclusion is often unclear, and they tend to trail off into dead ends. These discussions, though valuable, would have been more beneficial to exploring the application of Foucauldian philosophy in educational ethics if broken up and included in the prior two chapters. What Moghtader does in this chapter, however, is present the inseparability of self-transformation, learning, and politics in Foucault's work, and elaborate on discussions from the previous two chapters. This introduces one of Moghtader's primary themes: Foucault teaches that education is a way of life, even *the* way of life, and influences the entirety of the life of the subject, not just her studies.

In the fifth chapter "Power and Subjectivity" Moghtader continues his discussion of *Discincline and Punish,* and *The Philosophy of Sexuality vol. 1* and gives a detailed analysis of Foucault's reconstruction of Greco-Roman moral aesthetics in his final two books *The Use of Pleasure* and *The Care of the Self.* The first half of the chapter discusses biopolitics, and Foucault's involvement in the Iranian revolution, while the second half returns to the focus of the second and third chapters-- what it is to be subjects constituted partly by knowledge, and what this means for pedagogy. Moghtader explains Foucault's difficult final books through isolating what is distinct about their contribution to Foucault's philosophy, and how they build on his earlier works. Moghtader attempts to redeem these texts from their initial, less enthusiastic reception, structuring them as an extension of his earlier political works: "Caring for oneself is both an ethical and a political activity…Foucault's ethics invites the assessment of persons by themselves about the ways in which they are urged to constitute themselves as moral subjects."[2] It is in this chapter that Moghtader sets the basis of the ethics he proposes in the following two chapters.

The final two chapters "Educational Ethics" and "Implications and Conclusions" are Moghtader's most compelling and engaging. Ethics, Moghtader argues, is based in understanding ourselves as subjects creating and recreating relationships to ourselves, and subsequently relationships to others. Moghtader is navigating difficult territory here: between Foucault's problematization of moral imperatives and his theory of knowledge as powerful and productive, Moghtader must explain an ethics without commands but which is still action-guiding. Moghtader gives his reader a transfigured ethics, uniquely focused on the constitution of the self, rather than on responsibilities to others:

> The notion of conversation and self-transformation are interwoven in the pedagogical role of the teacher who tells the truth, who establishes personal relationship to assist this self-

2 Moghtader, Bruce. *Foucault and Educational Ethics.* New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016. PP. 75.

> transformation. The truth is not solely visible in discourse. It is demonstrated by the ontological character of the teacher and his/her way of life.[3]

Moghtader replaces the centrality of the student-teacher relationship in traditional imperative-based accounts of educational ethics with the act of study and intellectual engagement. Moghtader explains that to study, for Foucault, is to include oneself "in a conversation between persons, texts, and powers."[4] This not only closes Moghtader's argument, but ties together the narrative of Foucault's intellectual life he follows throughout the book, cumulating in the unity of his concepts of power, others, the good life, epistemology, and, of course, pedagogy.

Moghtader's first book is a strong and refreshing debut. He shows himself to have both mastered Foucauldian theory and be an innovative thinker in the application of an ethics without imperatives. Both historically and philosophically compelling, Moghtader's application of Foucauldian philosophy to educational ethics paves new ground for pragmatic interpretations of continental philosophy, and nudges its readers towards an ethics of self-understanding. Moghtader's book contributes both to Foucault scholarship and to educational studies through a compelling discussion of study as essential for the good life.

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[3] Ibid. PP. 83.

[4] Ibid. PP. 99.