

REVIEW

Frédéric Gros & Carlos Lévy (eds.), *Foucault et la philosophie antique* (Paris, Kimé, 2003). ISBN: 2841743128

The panorama of contemporary philosophy is divided over the status to be granted to Greco-Roman thought. Some authors prefer to discredit ancient philosophy, such as Heidegger (*Being and Time*) and Derrida, for whom the Platonic philosophy of truth and the Aristotelian philosophy of time are to be de(con)structed, and the Critical theory in its Habermasian version, which barely goes beyond the "Unfinished project of Modernity". There are also the nostalgics of "beautiful harmony" such as Gadamer, who from a conservative perspective rehabilitates the Platonic dialogical ideal, as well as the historians of ancient philosophy. And there are finally those who risk an innovative and productive reading of the ancient thought. The latter include the young Heidegger, who sees Aristotle as a precursor of the hermeneutics of facticity, the mature Heidegger who commemorates the pre-Socratics' poetry, Deleuze, who proposes a creative reading of Lucretius and Stoicism, and Foucault whose later writings (1980-1984) develop the original thesis of a regrettable forgetfulness of the ancient care of the self (*epimeleia heautou*). The older Foucault's interest in ancient philosophy is consistent with his intellectual cursus in that he remains faithful to the break with utopias by considering the necessary play between power and knowledge, and ultimately conceives of the interweaving of the liberation process and the "techniques of self" (or the power exerted by oneself over oneself). This leads Foucault to undertake a genealogy of the modes of subjectivation and, more specifically, to write a history of the ways of caring for oneself. The late Foucault widens the historical extent of his research, which was hitherto limited to the period from the Renaissance (fifteenth and sixteenth centuries) to Modernity (nineteenth to mid-twentieth centuries), and extends it back to Antiquity.

Foucault et la philosophie antique is the title of the proceedings from an international conference organized in Paris in 2001 around a course given by Foucault in 1981-1982 at the *Collège de France*, entitled *Herméneutique du sujet* (Gallimard/Seuil, 2001). F. Gros, who coedited *Foucault et la philosophie antique*, also helped edit this course, and wrote the luminous and generous "Situation du cours" (*Herméneutique du sujet*, p. 487-526). Volumes II and III of the *History of Sexuality* (1984) had already developed the main concepts developed by

Foucault based on his reading of ancient philosophies (care of the self, government of oneself and others, the aesthetics of existence, etc.). It is in the courses, however, that one finds the most detailed elaboration of Foucault's periodization (Platonic, Imperial, Christian and Cartesian moments), compared to which the information contained in the last two volumes of the *History of Sexuality* seems almost fragmentary. Moreover, the last courses devote many analyses to topics that receive little development in the books (cynicism, "direction of conscience", etc.). Hence the great importance of their publication.

In the first two sections of *Foucault et la philosophie antique*, the authors analyze the relationship of Foucault to the three major Hellenistic systems – Stoicism, Skepticism and Epicureanism. The first chapter (T. Benatouïl) presents a meticulous comparative study of Deleuze's and Foucault's conceptions of Stoicism. Let us note, however, that, contrary to what the author asserts (p. 33), Deleuze's interest in Stoicism does not disappear after *Logique du sens* (Minuit, 1969), as is demonstrated twenty years later in *Le Pli. Leibniz et le baroque* (Minuit, 1988, p. 71-72), where Stoic doctrine is associated with the production of the first logic of the event. The following chapter (L. Jaffro) is concerned with some "distortions" in Foucault's interpretation of Epictetus, for whom rhetoric is not as sharply opposed to *parrhêsia* (truth-telling) as Foucault maintains. The author also stresses, using a highly instructive approach, the rigidity of Foucault's periodization, which prevents him from considering the anti-Cartesianism of stoic obedience that was developed in England around the eighteenth century (in particular by A. Smith and Shaftesbury). The third chapter (V. Laurand) deepens the analyses devoted by Foucault to Musonius Rufus' doctrine of marriage. In the following chapter, the author (C. Lévy) discusses Foucault's exclusion of Skepticism in his exploration of ancient thought. Foucault would have voluntarily left out the thesis of Skepticism to avoid confronting this nihilistic side of care of the self, which would have weakened the historical process of the subject's construction that he wanted to highlight. The fifth chapter (A. Gigandet) attempts to rebuild the unity of Foucault's sporadic references to the Epicurean doctrine. The third and last section of the work is concerned with the "spiritual exercises" (*pratiques de l'âme*). One author initially studies the decisive passage for Foucault's analysis, which extends from the ancient "direction of conscience" based on care of the self to the Christian "direction of conscience" directed at renunciation of self (M. Senellart); one then explains the paradox of Platonism, which maintains a tension between the *epimeleai heautou* - care of the self - and the *gnôthi seauton* - self-knowledge (A. Castel-Bouchouchi); and one finally underlines the fact that the Nietzschean edict, "Make your life a work of art", which was revived by Foucault, can be achieved only in favour of a particular ethics of speech anchored in *parrhêsia*, or truth-telling (J. Davila).

Foucault does not propose any return to a Hellenic-Roman experimentation with care of the self. And it is this lack of desire to restore the past, conjugated with a reclamation of ancient philosophy for our actuality that puts the later Foucault in a delicate and stimulating position. Volumes II and III of the *History of Sexuality*, as well as the last lectures at the *Collège de France*, have the rare ability of presenting the vivacity of Hellenistic philosophy to non-specialists, while also contributing to the debate among initiates. This shows the richness of Foucault's ultimate explorations, which are admirably presented, problematized and constructively criticized by the authors of *Foucault et la philosophie antique*. (Some short biographical/bibliographical notes on the authors would have been helpful.)

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