



## INTRODUCTION

### **Special section: Contributions from The Foucault Circle – Coordinator’s introduction**

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As a result of the coronavirus outbreak, the Foucault Circle did not hold its annual meeting in either 2020 or 2021. Nevertheless, thanks to the efforts of our authors and referees, and the editors of *Foucault Studies*, all working under unprecedented, challenging conditions, we are able at last to bring out this Special Section of papers from the Foucault Circle. Joel Michael Reynolds (Georgetown University, USA) and Martin Bernales (Universidad Alberto Hurtado, Chile) have given us two excellent papers that engage not only with Foucault’s text but also, in the spirit of Foucault, make original use of his insights and methods to provide critical genealogies of our present, of who we are today.

In “Genopower: On Genomics, Disability, and Impairment,” originally presented at the 2019 meeting of the Foucault Circle at Stonehill College (Easton, MA) Reynolds argues that genomics represents a new configuration of power, government, knowledge, and subjectification. While Foucault’s genealogy of biopower gives us a framework for thinking critically about genomics, Reynolds argues that genomics is distinct from other modes of bio-power in its function and in its ‘social uptake’ as well as in its rapid rise as a key element of our present: “We live in an age of genomics” (Reynolds, p. 143).

Reynolds argues that

genomics is indeed noteworthy as a unique form of biopower and that its primary function is to precisify impairments in contradistinction to disability. I call the force at play in this process *genopower*. I discuss how this impacts Foucault-inspired debates in philosophy of disability and critical disability studies over the meaning of the disability-impairment distinction, and I argue that insofar as genopower gears into powerful cultural tropes that promote individualistic solutions to social issues, the socio-political effect of genomics with respect to disability—despite the aims of many of its practitioners—is indeed to normalize what Rosemarie Garland-Thomson calls “velvet eugenics.” (p. 144)

Reynolds’ paper brings into focus some of the crucial ethical, social, and political questions this increasing prevalence of genopower raises for us:

Are we human animals that are genomically different in ways that, while having no bearing on worth, bear upon how we should treat each other given those differences such that we should aim to create a world that is equitable in light of such differences? Or, are the differences genomic science discovers ultimately *irrelevant* given the tasks that confront building equitable societies, meaning that we should instead aim for a world that is just and equitable without needing to or caring to take into consideration such differences? The impact and import of these very different responses to the “facts” of genomic difference can hardly be overstated. (p. 160)

In light of his deep, critical engagement with the scholarship on disability, impairment, and genomics, Reynolds is led to frame genopower as “the foreclosure of a complex, human past, present, and future invariably lived in community that limits its meaning to an individual’s genetic expression [...]” (Reynolds, p. 158). Over and against this foreclosure, which would presume to hand each one over to the individual fate inscribed in their genes, Reynolds invites us to consider instead the “communal hope” that given “egalitarian frameworks, precisifying impairments could be a boon” (Reynolds, pp. 160-161).

In “The Forgotten Spanish Charity: Love, Government, and the Poor,” originally presented at the 2017 Foucault Circle meeting at Loyola Marymount University (Los Angeles, CA), Bernales “analyzes the articulation and legacy of the Spanish version of the Catholic doctrine of charity at the moment of its decline” in the eighteenth century (Bernales, p. 120). The excavation of this moment, he demonstrates, is crucial because it was in part through displacing the Catholic deployment of charity and taking over its work in a new form that the modern Spanish State was able to extend and intensify modern governmentality:

The charitable pastorate was not forgotten but became a building block against and upon which the Spanish police of the poor [was] established for creating a powerful and happy State. This unlikely encounter was the beginning of a conceptual and technological invention still in need of being fully traced for Spain and *América*—a moment when a distinctive pastoral power [was] incorporated into the modern State along with two concerns that will be critical for it, i.e., poverty and the poor. (Bernales, p. 138)

What is the distinctive form of pastoral power appropriated into the modern Spanish State? While we are inclined to see charity and almsgiving as synonymous, Bernales shows that the deployment of charity in the Catholic pastorate was a more complex and far-reaching phenomenon:

At the beginning of the eighteenth century, Spanish Catholic charity was not simply an informal and voluntary tithe but a doctrine with its own truths and its rules. Charity had its own knowledge and ways of conducting men and women [...] the critical goal of becoming a charitable believer entailed something else than to state “I believe”—it required a distinctive practice of self-mortification directed towards eliminating self-

love and thus allowing the love of charity to shape the believer's will in depth when a distinct number of crucial issues arise. (Bernales, p. 121)

To be charitable was not merely to give to the needy nor to have a compassionate feeling. Through careful examination of the archive, Bernales details how charity was developed and practiced as a government of oneself and others, involving among other things the "truth acts" of almsgiving and tribulation, and culminating in the constitution of the "charitable believer." The wealthy and the poor alike had to play their parts in this pastoral government of souls.

Bernales shows that the rise of the modern Spanish State took over and transformed this experience in order to solidify its hold on life: "the institutional deployment of the police of the poor was envisioned in part as the means by which the king and the citizens fulfilled their pious duties and thus helped out to forge a happy and powerful Nation" (Bernales, p. 135).

The problematization of poverty in the situation of the modern State cannot be properly understood outside of its genealogy. And in the moment when the State, in this case the Spanish State, established its grip on life, on the government of the living, we can see this problematization taking shape through the re-invention of the pastoral deployment of charity.

We are extremely happy to publish these two excellent papers, which represent so well the sort of scholarly conversations that we have all come to expect and cherish at the Annual Meetings of the Foucault Circle. After missing two years, we eagerly look forward to resuming these conversations when we meet in 2022 at Emory University in Atlanta. In the meantime, we can engage with the thought-provoking work of Reynolds and Bernales, which is sure to spark further discussion, critical investigation of the archive, and many experiments in new ways of thinking about and resisting configurations of power-knowledge in our present.

Many thanks to our peer reviewers and to the editors of *Foucault Studies* for their excellent work and patience in bringing this Special Section out during such challenging times.

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