

REVIEW

Eduardo Mendieta and Jeffrey Paris (eds.) 'Biopolitics and Racism', Special Issue of *Radical Philosophy Review*, Vol. 7, No. 1, (2004). ISSN: 1388-4441.

As the editors of this special issue of the *Radical Philosophy Review* remark in their brief introductory note, '[a] Michel Foucault renaissance is underway'.¹ Indeed, there has been a marked resurgence of interest in Foucault's work in both the French-speaking world, with the publication of new material in French last year, and in the English-speaking world. What seems to have in part precipitated the Anglophone resurgence of interest in Foucault's work is the translation into English of the series of lectures which he gave in 1976 at the Collège de France. This lecture course, entitled '*Il faut défendre la société*', was published in French by Gallimard in 1997.² Prior to its English publication in 2003 (as '*Society Must be Defended*'),³ Anglophone Foucaultians interested in tracing the development of Foucault's thought from *Discipline and Punish* to the first volume of *The History of Sexuality* had been forced to rely on summaries of the lectures in the work of French-speaking Foucault scholars writing in English.⁴ With the eventual translation of the lectures into

1 Eduardo Mendieta and Jeffrey Paris, 'Introduction', *Radical Philosophy Review* 7:1 (2004): iii. Future references to the text under review will be made as RPR.

2 The delay in publication was attributable to disputes over the intellectual property of the material and the wishes of Foucault's estate. Note, however, that "*Il faut défendre la société*" appeared in Italian translation as *Difendere la società* in 1990, and in *Les Temps Modernes* (in French) in 1991.

3 Michel Foucault, '*Society Must Be Defended*': *Lectures at the Collège de France, 1975-1976*, trans. David Macey, English series ed. Arnold I. Davidson (New York: Picador, 2003). Note also that Foucault's lecture course from the preceding year at the Collège de France, entitled *Les Anormaux*, was published by Gallimard in 1999, and translated into English in 2003. See Michel Foucault, *Abnormal: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1974-1975*, trans. Graham Burchell, English series ed. Arnold I. Davidson (New York: Picador, 2003). Both lecture courses have been reviewed in these pages: Brad Elliott Stone, 'Defending Society from the Abnormal: An Archaeology of Bio-Power', *Foucault Studies* 1 (2004): 77-91.

4 For example, see Ann Laura Stoler, *Race and the Education of Desire: Foucault's History of Sexuality and the Colonial Order of Things* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1995): 55-94; Beatrice Hanssen, *Critique of Violence: Between Poststructuralism and Critical Theory* (Routledge: New York, 2000): 97-157; John Marks, 'Foucault, Franks, Gauls', *Theory, Culture & Society* 17:5 (2000): 127-47; Stuart Elden, 'The War of Races and the

English, the understanding, and application, of Foucault's mid-1970s work on biopolitics has been greatly extended, and the renaissance proceeds apace.⁵ The current (Anglophone) resurgence of interest in Foucault's work is only *partly* attributable to the recent translation of these lecture courses into English. It is also in no small measure attributable, and the editors of the present volume state as much,⁶ to a confluence of certain political and historical events – the (re?)election of Bush II, the prosecution of the global 'War on Terror', the forces of fundamentalist terror/ism and state repression, the prevalence of racism (particularly Islamophobia and the vilification of asylum-seekers) and its articulation in the form of state practices, and so forth – to which a Foucaultian biopolitical analysis is particularly germane.⁷

The volume under review reflects the above themes and imperatives underpinning the renewed interest in Foucault's work. It both responds to the need to introduce English-speaking readerships to Foucault's 1976 Collège de France lectures, and also to employ Foucault's insights on biopolitics in theorising the current socio-political landscape. Quite neatly, two of the collected essays are oriented towards the first of these goals, and the remaining three are directed towards realizing the second. The essays by Julian Bourg and Todd May are, broadly speaking, exegetical. They aim to introduce English readers to the 'new' material by summarizing and explaining the substance of the lectures, and attempting to situate them, both chronologically and thematically, within Foucault's published work of the period. The essays by Ellen K. Feder, Kevin Thompson and Falguni A. Sheth, on the other hand, are more ambitious in seeking not just to integrate the Collège de France lectures into the extant Foucaultian *oeuvre*, but rather to use this new material to interpret and critique subjects as diverse as biotechnology, the ill-fated federal (US) Violence Initiative of the 1990s, and the articulation (by the state) of race as a technology. As both the subject matter of Foucault's lectures and the title of this volume imply, the common

Constitution of the State: Foucault's "*Il faut défendre la société*" and the Politics of Calculation', *boundary 2* 29:1 (2002): 125-51; Pasquale Pasquino, 'Political Theory of War and Peace: Foucault and the History of Modern Political Theory', *Economy and Society* 22:1 (1993): 76-88.

5 In addition to the essays in the volume under review, see Stone; Mariana Valverde, 'Review Essay: Michel Foucault, *Society must be defended: Lectures at the Collège de France 1975-1976*. (London: Picador, 2003)', *Law, Culture and the Humanities* 1 (2005): 119-31; Mark Kelly, 'Racism, Nationalism and Biopolitics: Foucault's *Society Must Be Defended*, 2003', *Contretemps: An Online Journal of Philosophy* 4 (2004): 58-70; Michael Dillon and Andrew Neal (eds.), *Foucault: Politics, Society, War* (forthcoming from Palgrave-MacMillan, 2005).

6 RPR: iii-iv.

7 A renewed interest is also no doubt attributable to the influence of contemporary philosophers who have continued, extended or adapted Foucault's biopolitical analysis (of whom perhaps the most important is Giorgio Agamben).

theme in all these essays (besides, of course, Foucault) is the question of race (as a form of social division, as a tool of sovereign power, as a technique of state, as a means of managing populations). I turn now to address each of the five essays individually, before concluding with some general comments concerning the collection as a whole.

As I mentioned above, the goal of the essays by Bourg and May is both to introduce English readers to the lectures and to integrate them into the existing body of Foucault's work. It was perhaps slightly uncharitable of me to suggest that this was somehow not an 'ambitious' undertaking, or at least less ambitious than putting Foucault's insights to work in critiquing current political arrangements, for as commentators on the lectures have noted there is a marked discontinuity between the central role which Foucault affords to race in the 1976 lectures, and the marginal place which he affords the same in the first volume of *The History of Sexuality*.⁸ There is also the extended treatment of the concept of intra-societal war, and the growing change of emphasis from discipline to biopower. Accounting for *'Society Must Be Defended'* is thus more difficult than it might appear at first glance, and both Bourg and May do a good job of this task. There is some unavoidable overlap in their summary and explication of the substance of Foucault's lectures, but they usefully frame the lecture course in different ways. For his part, Bourg in his essay *'"Society Must Be Defended" and the Last Foucault'* locates the lecture course as a transitional body of work, bridging 'Foucault's early- and mid-1970s interests in institutions and coercive subject formation and the emergence of the themes that occupied him for the remaining years of his life: biopower, governmentality, and ethics.'⁹ While I do not entirely agree with him that the question of the state (and juridical forms, law, etc.) 'was neglected in *Discipline and Punish*',¹⁰ Bourg does usefully chart the (undeniable) change of emphasis in Foucault's work towards a more central consideration of these apparatuses and mechanisms of power, concluding with some historical reasons as to why Foucault changed tack (such as the fading promise of 1968, the anti-totalitarian turn in French intellectual politics, and the publication in French of Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn's *Gulag Archipelago* in June 1974).¹¹ Bourg's reading of the lectures is thus convincing and helpful to the reader looking to 'place' the new material.

As with Bourg's piece, May's essay, entitled 'War in the Social and Disciplinary Bodies', gives a good introduction and orientation to the reader coming to these lectures for the first time. He offers a very clear summary of Foucault's reading of Henri de Boulainvilliers's radical 'historico-political'¹²

8 For example, see Stoler: 56.

9 RPR: 5.

10 RPR: 11.

11 RPR: 11-3.

12 Foucault, *'Society Must Be Defended'*: 52.

discourse (which reading forms a central part of *'Society Must Be Defended'*), and, like Bourg, he locates areas of similarity and continuity between the lectures and Foucault's monographs published before and after them. Interestingly, however, where May differs from Bourg is in his identification of one of the differences between the lecture course, on the one hand, and *Discipline and Punish* and the first volume of *The History of Sexuality* on the other. May argues that whereas these latter works are 'written from the point of view of an entangling power', the lecture course provides (in the example of Boulainvilliers's history) a 'clearer view of resistance [as situated counter-knowledge]'.¹³ For May, then, the significance of *'Society Must Be Defended'* resides principally in its ability to show us concrete instances of resistance (which, as Foucault had claimed, were inextricably linked to power). In doing this, the lecture course 'helps open up the possibility for resistance, for our resistance'.¹⁴ Indeed, he argues, armed with this knowledge it is possible to re-read *Discipline and Punish* in order to foreground instances of resistance discussed by Foucault in the text, but which have not received much critical attention from Foucault scholars (May's example is Foucault's discussion of the Fourierists towards the end of the book).¹⁵ May's essay is thus useful not only in illuminating the lecture courses, but in giving us means to productively re-read Foucault's other texts.

Inspired no doubt by Foucault's injunction to use his work as a 'tool-box',¹⁶ the remaining essays in the volume seek to employ Foucault's insights on biopolitics and racism to theorise a number of different aspects of contemporary political formations. The first of these essays, Feder's, 'The Discursive Production of the 'Dangerous Individual'', is a useful examination of a particular US government program of the early 1990s, the Violence Initiative, which sought to target the problem of violence (read: urban, black, young male violence) as a matter of public health and as something genetically determined. Under the program, school teachers were to screen their pupils in order to identify those manifesting early signs of irritability and potentially violent traits, and to inform relevant public health professionals who would aim to intervene at an early age (through a range of available techniques and methods, ranging from sending children to day camps to medicating them).¹⁷ Feder reveals the biopolitical logic informing this particular government program (in which 'dangerous' urban populations were to be managed and controlled under the aegis of public health) and also how despite the ham-fisted institutional protestations of racial neutrality, the

13 RPR: 54.

14 RPR: 55.

15 RPR: 43-4.

16 Michel Foucault, (1974) 'Prisons et asiles dans le mécanisme du pouvoir', in *Dits et Ecrits*, t. II. (Paris: Gallimard, 1994): 523.

17 RPR: 25-6.

Violence Initiative was in fact deeply racist. In doing this she makes interesting use not only of Foucault's understanding of racism in *'Society Must Be Defended'*, as a vector of state power, but also of Foucault's earlier 'archeological' work in order to excavate the 'pre-conceptual ground of [the] racist discourse [of the Violence Initiative]'.¹⁸ Feder's essay is an interesting and thoroughly convincing critique of a particular instance of state racism, and if she does not quite follow through on her early promise to articulate the politics of race and gender together through *'Society Must Be Defended'* (and her chosen topic does indeed lend itself to such an intersectional analysis), nevertheless her piece is an instructive example of how the lecture course can be used to theorise contemporary state racism.

Like Feder, Thompson utilizes *'Society Must Be Defended'* in conjunction with other Foucaultian material (namely, Foucault's later work on the care of the self) in order to critique an aspect of contemporary biopolitics. The particular subjects of Thompson's analysis in *'The Spiritual Disciplines of Biopower'* are the new biotechnologies of genetic counseling and performance enhancement therapies, which, he convincingly demonstrates, form part of an apparatus of neo-liberal governance in which '[t]he compliant citizen governs themselves [*sic*] by managing their susceptibilities'.¹⁹ Where Thompson's essay is most interesting, and frustratingly, where his argument is in need of further development, is in its closing stages where he pursues the suggestion inherent in Foucault's later work that 'genuine self-formation ... is only possible in and through the very same heteronymous structures and practices that produce subjects as governable beings'.²⁰ It is not this suggestion itself which is in need of further elucidation,²¹ but rather the questions of what this strategy of 'tactical reversal' would look like in this context and of how it might take place. On these topics the author is both brief and somewhat vague. He seems to suggest a devolving of biotechnological medical decision-making to something more transparent, collective and deliberative, a conclusion which it does not take a Foucaultian analysis to establish – indeed, standard liberal approaches advocate the same as a matter of personal autonomy.

The final essay, Sheth's *'The Technology of Race: Enframing, Violence, and Taming the Unruly'*, is probably the most nuanced examination of biopolitics and state racism in the collection. Sheth argues that the state identifies an element within the body politic which she calls 'the unruly' (a somewhat elusive concept, and one which is open to ongoing resignification,

18 RPR: 27.

19 RPR: 64.

20 RPR: 68.

21 To be fair, the author has written at length elsewhere on this particular claim: Kevin Thompson, 'Forms of Resistance: Foucault on Tactical Reversal and Self-Formation', *Continental Philosophy Review* 36 (2003): 113-38.

but which Sheth hints may constitute anything from one's social history, religious affiliation, skin tone or clothing, to one's bodily comportment).²² The unruly is perceived by the state as a threat to the sovereign order, and thus becomes instantiated (and naturalized as) the ground of racial difference. The state thus mobilizes racial difference as a technology in order to manage populations and to 'effect a continual sense of vulnerability [with respect to the law and other social groupings]'.²³ Drawing on Heidegger, Benjamin and Agamben, in addition to Foucault's 1976 lectures, Sheth's essay is challenging and well argued. In places her writing is somewhat opaque, such as when she describes her enterprising fusion of Heidegger and Foucault as their 'mutual interlocution on the terrain of race', and in others tautologous ('...their works facilitate an illumination, 'a lighting,'...').²⁴ For the most part, however, this does not cloud the theoretical rigour of her piece and the salience of her conclusions.

In sum, this short special issue of the *Radical Philosophy Review* is an excellent collection of essays. It is both a valuable guide to the newcomer seeking an account of the 1976 Collège de France lectures and a very good example of how these lectures can further our understanding of contemporary state racism.

Ben Golder, Birkbeck College

22 RPR: 81.

23 RPR: 92.

24 RPR: 80.