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Foucault and Philosophical Practice

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We are very pleased to open *Foucault Studies* No. 25 with the special issue entitled “Foucault and Philosophical Practice,” guest edited by Sverre Raffnsøe (Copenhagen Business School) and Alain Beaulieu (Laurentian University).

Foucault had a complex and ambivalent relationship with philosophy. Although he was originally trained in philosophy in Paris, many of his main sources, interlocutors, and followers are not philosophers *per se*. This contributes to making his œuvre quite multidisciplinary, perhaps the most multidisciplinary since Marx. In the context of this special issue, nevertheless, it might also be worth recalling that Foucault had a number of significant philosophical relationships, while he also persisted in operating at the margins of philosophy proper. In 1949 Foucault graduated from *École Normale Supérieure* with a *Diplôme d'études supérieures* under the supervision of the German philosophy specialist Jean Hyppolite. Foucault's DES thesis was entitled *La Constitution d'un transcendantal dans La Phénoménologie de l'esprit de Hegel*. In 1961, in Sorbonne, he completed his main doctoral thesis (*thèse principale*), *Folie et déraison: Histoire de la folie à l'âge classique* under the supervision (*rapporteur principal*) of the philosopher of science Georges Canguilhem. He then completed his secondary thesis (*thèse complémentaire*), a translation and substantial commentary on Kant's 1798 work *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View*, under the supervision (*rapporteur principal*) of Jean Hyppolite. Both theses, which were required for Foucault's *Doctorat d'État*, were not orthodox philosophical works.¹ On the one hand, *Folie et déraison* includes a wide range of historical and archival material with which philosophers are not always familiar; and, on the other hand, in his secondary thesis Foucault was audacious enough to play Nietzsche against Kant before the former really started to be considered as a true philosopher in France.² Foucault's academic training also includes a *licence* in psychology in 1949 as well as a *Diplôme de psychopathologie* in 1952. In the early fifties, he toyed with the Marxists led by Althusser.

Foucault's desire for “non-philosophy” was explicit very early, as indicated by his interest in history, psychology, and politics. Literature, especially Raymond Roussel,

¹ For a discussion on the writing and public defense of Foucault's theses, including a complete reproduction of the defense report, see: Didier Eribon, *Michel Foucault* [1989] (1991), Part 2, Chap. 1.

² Gilles Deleuze, *Nietzsche et la philosophie* (1962); Pierre Klossowski, *Un si funeste désir* (1963); Jacques Derrida, *L'Écriture et la différence* (1967); Pierre Klossowski, *Nietzsche et le cercle vicieux* (1969).

was also of interest for the young Foucault.³ As we know, Foucault's work did in the end transcend disciplinary boundaries. There is a Foucault historian, a Foucault methodologist of human sciences, a Foucault sociologist, a Foucault arts theoretician, a Foucault Hellenist, etc. Over the last decades, his conceptual tools have been massively applied to a number of domains and sub-disciplines on which Foucault himself never or almost never wrote, including gender, colonialist, queer, feminist and animal studies, as well as accounting, education and nursing, to mention a few. Foucault himself promoted the diversity of application of his work beyond philosophy. In that sense, he fully endorsed Deleuze's original suggestion from 1972 to use theory as a tool-box,⁴ as evident, for instance, in an interview from 1974, where Foucault says: "I would like my books to be a kind of tool-box others can rummage through to find a tool they can use however they wish in their own area [...] I don't write for an audience, I write for users, not readers."⁵ Foucault was well aware of the potential of adaptability of his own concepts, and he encouraged others to perform similar analyses in their own fields. Foucault was trained in philosophy and yet his work calls for an outside of philosophy. This binary attitude is in line with Deleuze, who once said: "Nonphilosophical understanding isn't inadequate or provisional, it's one of philosophy's two sides, one of its two wings."⁶ A bird can take flight only with two wings...

What about Foucault's philosophical wing, then? Is there something like a "Foucauldian philosophy" similar to what we refer to as Platonism or Heideggerianism? The articles gathered in this special issue support the evidence of a Foucauldian way of practicing philosophy. Foucault can be called a philosopher in the Deleuzo-Guattarian sense⁷ considering the wide range of concepts he created (illegalism, panopticism, biopower, governmentality, etc.) and his reconceptualization of other notions (madness, power, knowledge, etc.). He also problematized core philosophical matters (reason, subject, truth, liberty, ethics, politics, ontology, etc.) and discussed classical authors (Plato, Kant, Hegel, Heidegger, Nietzsche, etc.). Yet, Foucault reminds his readers about the limits of philosophy that represent the "danger" of being too theoretical; practice for him has a privilege over theory. When Foucault writes: "I hope historians of philosophy will forgive me for saying this, but I believe that Bentham is more important for our society than Kant or Hegel,"⁸ he salutes Bentham for presenting a concrete architectural model (panoptic) that is useful to understand today's forms of power. Similarly, Foucault values practice over theory when he asserts: "I am an experimenter and not a theorist. [...] I am an experimenter in the sense that I write in order to change myself and in order to think not the same thing as before."⁹

Foucauldian philosophy implies a particular pragmatic that aims at understanding concretely and even materially, yet conceptually, who we are, how the world we live in is made, and how both us and the world could be transformed and become otherwise. Foucault's philosophical practice expresses a disinterest for speculation and universals. Still, it implies a wisdom that focuses on a historically constituted present that will

³ Michel Foucault, "Dire et voir chez Raymond Roussel" [1962], in *Dits et Écrits*, Vol. I, ed. Daniel Defert, François Ewald and Jacques Lagrange (1994), 205-215; Michel Foucault, *Raymond Roussel* (1963).

⁴ Michel Foucault and Gilles Deleuze, "Intellectuals and Power" [1972], in *Foucault Live. Collected Interviews, 1961-1984*, ed. Sylvère Lotringer (1996), 76.

⁵ Michel Foucault, "Prisons et asiles dans le mécanisme du pouvoir" [1974], in *Dits et Écrits*, Vol. II, ed. Daniel Defert, François Ewald and Jacques Lagrange (1994), 523-524.

⁶ Gilles Deleuze, *Négotiations* (1995), 140.

⁷ Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *What is Philosophy?* (1994).

⁸ Michel Foucault, "Truth and Juridical Forms" [1973], in *Power*, ed. James Faubion (2000), 58.

⁹ Michel Foucault, "Interview with Michel Foucault" [1978], in *Power*, ed. James Faubion (2000), 240.

forever become otherwise, thus is condemned to requiring new tools of analysis. Foucault sees humans, their existing habits and current institutions as singular case studies to be experienced, analyzed, and criticized in singular ways, opening up to an ethics of the arts of living. The various technologies, modes, and practices of subjectivation must ultimately be counter-balanced by a philosophical practice of liberation. All this makes Foucault a truly nominalist thinker.¹⁰

The contributors of this special issue explore some aspects of this Foucauldian philosophical practice, whether by studying the practice of self-modification in the medium of thought, the practice of a methodological pluralism, the practice of historiography, or the practice of care of the self.

Beginning the special issue, “Philosophical Practice as Self-modification: An Essay on Michel Foucault’s Critical Engagement with Philosophy” by Sverre Raffnsøe, Marius Gudmand-Høyer and Morten Sørensen Thaning (Copenhagen Business School) aims at articulating Foucault’s philosophical practice. It emphasizes that what makes Foucault’s œuvre coherent is above all an assiduous philosophical practice taking the form of an ongoing yet concrete self-modification in the medium of thought. If this continuity is disregarded, Foucault’s œuvre tends to fall into relatively isolated parts.

After discussing Foucault’s famous characterization of philosophy in terms of *ascēsis* in *The Use of Pleasure*, the article segues to articulating his characterization of philosophy as a form of meditation, distinct from both Cartesian meditation and Hegelian meditation: Foucault’s meditation aims at standing vigil for the day to come.

The following parts further articulate the crucial traits of Foucault’s understanding of philosophy. Turning to Foucault’s in-depth investigation of philosophy in the Antiquity during his lectures at the Collège de France in the 1980s, the essay develops how philosophy here, according to Foucault, begins to distinguish itself by establishing itself as an activity with a privileged relationship to truth and truth-telling as an unremitting, existentially determining challenge for the philosopher. Insofar as the capability to realize and the ability to speak the truth under challenging political and ontological circumstances cannot be taken for granted, the obligation to speak the truth necessitates an ongoing ethical-practical philosophical work upon oneself by the philosopher, developed in an ongoing critical and political exchange with others.

The article argues that a salient feature in Foucault’s œuvre that makes it stand apart in a contemporary theoretical, scientific, and analytic landscape is above all his ongoing assiduous philosophical practice. An outstanding feature of Foucault’s thought today is its meditative character and its insistence on an ongoing conversion and self-transformation where one seeks to know oneself better and to take care of oneself by losing and regaining oneself. Yet, this very philosophical insistence on experience as self-transformation is not only what makes Foucault’s thought challenging, but equally what makes it exceptional today where the access to truth no longer seems to necessitate a transformation of the cognizant subject. In this sense, the ‘untimeliness’ of Foucault’s philosophical thought may also be an essential part of its attractiveness.

Raising the question of how to do philosophy following Foucault, “Philosophical Practice following Foucault” by Verena Erlenbush-Anderson (Morgan State University)

¹⁰ Michel Foucault, “Questions of Method” [1980], in *The Foucault Effect*, ed. Graham Burchell, Colin Gordon and Peter Miller (1991), 86; Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality* [1976] (1978), 93; Michel Foucault, “Preface to *The History of Sexuality Volume II*” [1976], in *The Foucault Reader*, ed. Paul Rabinow (1984), 334; Thomas R. Flynn, “Foucault and Historical Nominalism,” in *Sartre, Foucault and Historical Reason*, Vol. II (2005), 31-47; Barry Allen, “Foucault’s Nominalism,” in *Foucault and the Government of Disability*, ed. Shelley Tremain (2005), 93-107.

develops a heuristic of different modes of philosophical engagement with Michel Foucault's work in order to encourage and assist self-reflection about contemporary uses of Foucault.

Drawing on debates in the history of philosophy, the article begins by examining different modes in which the past philosopher is already engaged with and taken up within larger debates about the relationship between philosophy and its history. Whereas contextualists hold that the history of philosophy and historical philosophers are to be understood in their own terms, appropriationists consider the history of philosophy as a source of ideas and arguments that may be freely used in current philosophical arguments; and methodologists apply a past philosopher's distinctive methods to problems and contexts that might not have been of concern to that philosopher to use, modify, or generate new concepts on the basis of this inquiry.

These distinctions indicate three strands of the Foucault scholarship, or three ways of practicing philosophy following Foucault. Contextualism aims at understanding Foucault's project in its own terms by way of textual exegesis. With some degree of attentiveness to their historical specificity, appropriationism applies Foucault's concepts to a range of phenomena that may or may not have been of concern to Foucault himself. Finally, methodologism uses Foucault's methods to conduct archaeologies and genealogies of the present issues and takes up, transforms, or abandons his concepts as necessary.

While it is possible to analytically distinguish between contextualist, appropriationist, and methodologist uses of Foucault, they are nevertheless not to be considered in isolation since there are significant overlaps and synergies in philosophical practice. To illustrate this and elucidate contextualist, appropriationist, and methodologist uses of Foucault, the article examines three illuminating queer and feminist philosophical engagements with Foucault (Lynne Huffer, Penelope Deutscher, Jemina Repo) to explicate and illustrate the aims and strengths of each strand. Whereas each strand develops a distinct response to the widespread failure to read Foucault's work on sex and his analysis of biopower together, it is their joint mobilization that promises the most fruitful strategy for advancing philosophical scholarship. Verena Erlenbush-Anderson thus argues that the most productive approach for philosophers hoping to work with Foucault, beyond Foucault, lies in a methodological pluralism that draws on all available tools and modes of inquiry.

Subsequently, Réal Fillion's (University of Sudbury) "Freedom in the Archive: On Doing Philosophy through Historiography" offers a thorough discussion of Foucault's practice of historiography in relation to knowledge. Considering the importance granted to knowledge in relation to archival work, it might be tempting to situate Foucault in line with Kant's project. However, Fillion argues that Foucault's distinct sensibility to history rather brings him closer to Hegel's *Science of Logic* than to Kant's transcendental philosophy. Hegel's unification of subjectivity and objectivity finds resonance in Foucault's distinct archival perspective that paves the way to processes of subjectivation and objectivation at the core of a practical philosophy that opens up possibilities of transformation.

Throughout his article, Fillion discusses the long-lasting debates between Foucault and historians (Is Foucault a historian or a philosopher?) which brings him to consider as truly philosophical Foucault's practice of conducting archival work and historiographical investigations in prelude of writing histories and developing narratives. These histories are meant to produce transformative effects on the readers.

Doing so, Fillion argues, Foucault's engagement with the writing of history is "illuminated" by Hegel through what one can call a "temporalization of reason," which implies a transformation of who we are, how we feel and think. As Fillion posits, there is a practical process of cognition at play in Foucault that could be linked with Hegel's conception of Life. Ultimately, Foucault's singular philosophical practice of history problematizes, while leaving open and not giving a definite answer to, the question of how to "reconnect us with the difficult space of our freedom."

Finally, the special issue includes an article by Edward McGushin (Stonehill College) entitled "The Role of Descartes's Dream in the *Meditations* and in the Historical Ontology of Ourselves." McGushin brings together two aspects of Foucault's work, namely, the early reading of Descartes's dream and the "arts of living" thematized later on in his ethics. After recalling the logic that led Foucault to reconsider the traditional practice of the care of the self, McGushin moves on to discussing how the dreaming subject, the waking subject, and truth can be integrated in the experience of philosophy as an art of living.

Originally in the Western tradition, "technologies of the self" imply a transformation of the psyche. In modernity, there is a disqualification of the spiritual care of the self in favour of an objective, impersonal scientific knowledge, as well as biopower and governmentality. According to Foucault, as McGushin duly reminds us, this disqualification culminates in "The Cartesian Moment." One of the key elements of this transformation has to do with the status of the dream. Drawing on Foucault's early comment on Binswanger, for whom the dream means: "I don't know what is happening to me," McGushin discusses the way Foucault criticizes Descartes' will to overcome the dream in search of certainties. The "Cartesian Moment" is symptomatic of a loss regarding the old experience of dream (as thematized, for instance, by Artemidorus), which teaches us to accept the presence of an obscure system of symbols, to live with the difficulty/impossibility to reach certainties, and to value a certain form of doubt that does not require to be overcome. McGushin discusses inspiring parallels between the early Foucault's interest for unreason as madness and Foucault's study of dream integrated in an ethics of the care of the self. The inclusion or rehabilitation of the positive power of dream in philosophical practice will then favour the world of imagination, the capacity to imagine an otherwise subject and a different world. Foucault's project of meditating on the dream ultimately aims at challenging the erosion of the "imaginative capability of the dreaming sleeper."

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