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REVIEW ARTICLE

Foucault, The End of a Decade

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Ben Golder, *Foucault and the Politics of Rights* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2015), 246 pp. (pb), $24.94, ISBN 978-0-8047-9649-1

Stuart Elden, *Foucault's Last Decade* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2016), 272 pp. (pb), $26.95, ISBN 978-0-745-68391-1

Mitchell Dean & Kaspar Villadsen, *State Phobia and Civil Society. The Political Legacy of Michel Foucault* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2016), 208 pp. (pb), $28.95, ISBN 978-0-8047-9697-2

Laura Cremonesi, Orazio Irrera, Daniele Lorenzini & Martina Tazzioli, eds., *Foucault and the Making of Subjects* (London: Rowan & Littlefield, 2016), 194 pp. (pb), $39.95, ISBN 978-1-78660-105-6

Daniele Lorenzini, Arianne Revel, Arianna Sforzini, eds., *Michel Foucault: éthique et vérité. (1980-1984)* (Paris: Vrin, 2013), 267pp. (pb), 23€, ISBN 978-2-7116-2520-8

With the recent publication of the fourth volume of Foucault's *History of Sexuality*, *Les aveux de la chair*, the intense editorial activity surrounding his work appears to be drawing to a close.[1] The publication of this long-awaited volume comes just after the edition of *Theories et Institutions Pénales* (2015), the last volume of his lectures at the Collège de France.[2] While several smaller texts, interviews and documents might still appear in years to come, we have probably reached the end of a cycle.[3]

The wide range of material currently available has given us a more comprehensive view of Foucault's last decade. Ten years ago almost none of his lectures (either at the College de France or elsewhere) were open to consultation and our understanding of the 'late' Foucault was rather limited.[4] Only with the publication in 2001 of *L'herméneutique du sujet* in French and of *Fearless*

[1] Michel Foucault, *Les aveux de la chair* (Paris: Gallimard, 2018).

[2] Michel Foucault, *Théories et institutions pénales, Cours au Collège de France. 1971–1972* (Paris: éditions de l'EHESS, 2015).

[3] With the notable exception of the forthcoming publication of *Le discours philosophique* that assembles his lectures at Tunis between 1966 and 1967. Beyond that, new important material might emerge from the 117 boxes filled with 37,000 pages of archives recently sold by Daniel Defert to the Bibliothèque Nationale de France which have not been entirely made public yet.

[4] Apart from his lectures at the Collège de France, important publications include especially the 1980 Darmouth College lectures: Michel Foucault, *L'origine de l'herméneutique de soi* (Paris: Vrin, 2013); the 1981 Louvain lectures: Michel Foucault, *Wrong-Doing, Truth-Telling. The Function of Avowal in Justice* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014); the 1982 Toronto lectures: Michel Foucault, *Dire vrai sur soi-même* (Paris: Vrin, 2017); the 1983 Berkeley lectures recently published by Vrin: Michel Foucault, *Discours et Vérité* (Paris: Vrin, 2016).

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Speech in English, did this begin to change. Progressively, the links between his reconceptualisation of power through his studies on governmentality, his genealogy of the modern subject and his interest in the antique care of the self as a tool to invent 'new subjectivities' became more obvious. These topics had remained the object of a rather fragmented scholarly treatment (with studies on governmentality, on neoliberalism, on subject formation, etc.), but the recent academic works under review here have begun to draw out a more global view of the so-called 'late Foucault'. This has not only offered us a more precise account of how Foucault came to redirect his work after 1976, it has also provided a more profound picture of how his changing politics in France's 'liberal moment' shaped his scholarly and academic work.[5]

We can now connect, for example, Foucault's counterintuitive plea for 'rights' and his analysis of the counter-conducts opposing the rise of a Christian pastoral power. Likewise, we now understand better his treatment of subjectivation techniques in antiquity as a way of thinking about the autonomy of the subject and, more controversially, his interest in neoliberal governmentality as an attempt to imagine a mode for subjects to become 'less governed'. Foucault's last decade appears increasingly as part of the profound shift that characterised the French left in the aftermath of May 1968.[6] We must then also understand the 'late Foucault' as another, but subtle, attempt to envision social transformation outside the horizon of Marxism, through reinventing subjectivity and autonomy within the existing social order. No matter how these new questions and approaches unfold in the years to come, our understanding of Foucault's last decade has been profoundly changed by recent scholarship.

Reshaping Foucault's *History of Sexuality*

Foucault's *History of Sexuality* is undoubtedly one of the most intriguing projects undertaken by the philosopher in his later life. Before the publication of the lectures at the College de France, our knowledge of its genesis was extremely limited. The reason for the long gap separating the first volume (1976) and the following ones (1984) was – and remains – the object of intense speculation. When the first volume appeared Foucault had already announced six volumes of his history, none of which was published in its initially planned form. Yet, when volumes two and three appeared, Foucault had profoundly altered his project. For a long time, this shift has been interpreted either as a moment of 'crisis' in his thought, because of a dispute with his editor or even because of an 'existential' event like his experience with LSD in Death Valley in California.[7]

Stuart Elden's *Foucault's Last Decade* is the most recent attempt to 'show connections where there were seemingly discontinuities'.[8] Elden has carefully studied an impressively large amount of material to initiate, as he claims, a full break with the image of a 'late' Foucault embarking on an 'ethical turn' in contradiction with his 1966 fulmination against humanism in *The Order of Things*.[9] Opposing this standard interpretation, Elden's thorough study demonstrates that Foucault's shifting concerns were not the product of a 'profound crisis' but came from his

[5] See especially Michael C. Behrent, 'Foucault and France's Liberal Moment', in Stephen W. Sawyer and Iain Stewart, eds., *In Search of the Liberal Moment. Democracy, Anti-totalitarianism, and Intellectual Politics in France since 1950* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 155–6; Emile Chabal, *France since the 1970s: History, Politics and Memory in an Age of Uncertainty* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2014); idem, *A Divided Republic: Nation, State and Citizenship in Contemporary France* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015).

[6] See especially Michael C. Behrent, 'Penser le XX^{e} siècle avec Michel Foucault', *Revue d'histoire moderne et contemporaine*, 4, 60-4/4 bis (2013), 7–28.

[7] See, for example, recently, 'Michel Foucault in Death Valley: A Boom interview with Simeon Wade', *Boom California*, 10 Sept. 2017, available at https://boomcalifornia.com/2017/09/10/michel-foucault-in-death-valley-a-boom-interview-with-simeon-wade/ (last visited 6 Sept. 2018).

[8] Eugène Wolters, 'Foucault's Last Decade: An interview with Stuart Elden', *Critical Theory*, 30 July 2016, available at http://www.critical-theory.com/foucaults-last-decade-an-interview-with-stuart-elden/ (last visited 6 Sept. 2018).

[9] Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things* (New York: Routledge Classics, 2005).

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evolving readings of Christian texts and confessional writings. In fact, very early after the publication of his first volume in 1976 Foucault began to have doubts about his analysis. As early as 1977 he was 'not certain' about what he wanted to write in the following volumes and he was increasingly interested in the question of truth and its relation to the constitution of the subject. As Elden argues, Foucault changed tack 'from a project begun when his focus was the interrelation of power and knowledge to one where truth and subjectivity were to the fore, with new ideas about technologies of the self'.[10] In a 1977 interview with the 'new philosopher' Bernard Henri-Levy, Foucault explained that his intention was now 'to follow a more narrow thread: the one that through so many centuries has linked sex and the search for truth in our societies', postulating that now his 'problem [was] the politics of truth'.[11]

For Elden, the reason behind Foucault's change is best traced to his extensive work on concupiscence and confession, which he planned to include in the original second volume, provisionally entitled *The Flesh and the Body*.[12] The entirety of the volume was imagined as a study of confession going back to the Council of Trent and its aim was to explore how sexuality was intertwined with techniques of confession. But, after the publication of the *Will to Knowledge* in 1976, Foucault decided to go further back in time and incorporate much earlier material. By the summer of 1977 he was studying the fathers of the church and, as Frédéric Gros observes, he was focusing on 'the moment of emergence of a ritualised obligation, of an injunction of verbalisation by the subject of a truth-telling about himself'.[13]

The study of the Christian pastorate made Foucault revise some of the claims he made in *The Will to Knowledge* and in the draft of the second volume. Moreover, this new research would become the basis of 'a still broader project: the reformulation of the entire *History of Sexuality* to a history of the emergence of the modern subject'.[14] The Christian pastorate thus became not only central to Foucault as a way of understanding the new forms of government in the West but also played a crucial role in his investigations into the production of a certain truth regarding the self. Foucault's move towards the study of governmentality in his lectures of 1978 and 1979, then, should not be read as a resolute rupture with his research on sexuality but rather as a an anticipation of his 'later work on technologies of the self'.[15] As Foucault wrote in 1978, 'what the history of the pastorate involves, therefore, is the entire history of procedures of human individualisation in the West. Let's say also that it involves the history of the subject'.[16]

This redirection of his project slowly moved it back even further in history to antiquity. This resulted in him delaying the second volume on Christianity that he had almost finished around 1981–2.[17] His increasing interest in antique texts made the contrast between antiquity and early Christianity crucial in the reshaping of his history. As the editors of *Foucault and the Making of Subjects* argue, Christian monastic subjectivity

> is produced within a network of obedience and the 'truth' is extracted from it through techniques of confession (a practice producing a strong form of subjection); on the contrary, ancient subjectivity makes room for the autonomous action of the individual (self-mastery),

[10] Stuart Elden, 'Review: Foucault's Confessions of the Flesh', *Theory, Culture & Society*, 20 Mar. 2018, available at https://www.theoryculturesociety.org/review-foucaults-confessions-flesh/ (last visited 6 Sept. 2018).

[11] Michel Foucault, 'Non au sexe roi. Interview with Bernard-Henri Lévy', *Le Nouvel Observateur*, 644, 12–21 Mar. (1977), 92–130. Available online at http://1libertaire.free.fr/MFoucault225.html (last visited 6 Sept. 2018).

[12] See Philippe Chevalier, *Michel Foucault et le christianisme* (Paris: ENS éditions, 2011), 62.

[13] Frédéric Gros, 'Avertissement', in Foucault, *Les aveux de la chair*, iii. On the precise chronology of Foucault's work see Daniel Defert, 'Chronologie', in Michel Foucault, *Dits et écrits I. 1954–1975* (Paris: Gallimard, 2001), 13–90.

[14] Stuart Elden, *Foucault's Last Decade* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2016), 98.

[15] Elden, *Foucault's Last Decade*, 99.

[16] Michel Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population. Lectures at the College de France, 1977–1978* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 184.

[17] Gros, 'Avertissement', v.

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and the truth involved in it mainly concerns the cosmos, with little attention given to one's 'inner truth'.[18]

Speaking of a 'hermeneutics of the self' in the Age of Antiquity did not make sense since, as Foucault argued, 'the self' does not have to be 'interpreted' or 'discovered' but 'constituted, constituted by the force of truth'.[19] Therefore, with Christianity, the 'the deciphering of the interiority of the subject' 'takes the ascendancy and the care of the self eventually fades'.[20]

This central distinction in the way antiquity and early Christianity related the subject to truth would come to reshape Foucault's history of sexuality and the importance of antiquity in it. As Elden shows, Foucault came to believe that 'there (was) a fundamental break between a pagan obligation to know yourself and a Christian, monastic precept of confessing your inner thoughts to a superior'.[21] This break, he claims, is at the heart of his history and Foucault, too, seems to have put it at the forefront of his last book. Indeed, in what would have been the introduction to the fourth volume, Foucault wrote that what has to be demonstrated 'is the new definition of the relations between subjectivity and truth that will give this ancient prescriptive nucleus an unprecedented meaning and bring to the old conception of pleasures and their economy important modifications'. 'These changes', Foucault claimed, 'are less about the division between what is permitted and what is defended than about the analysis of the domain of the *aphrodisia* and the kind of relation the subject is expected to have with them'.[22]

This shift of attention profoundly altered Foucault's initial project. In 1976 Foucault was interested in the contrast between our own *scientia sexualis*, which constitutes specific 'procedures for telling the truth of sex' and the ancient and oriental *ars erotica* as 'a practice and accumulated as an experience', where truth is drawn from the economy of pleasure itself.[23] By 1984, however, the key contrast lay between the antique *aphrodisia* found in Greco-Roman antiquity (and its concomitant techniques of the self) and their institutionalisation within the ascetic practices of a Christian pastorate concerned with renouncing the temptations of the flesh. This precise history connects the important detours Foucault made through governmentality, the study of avowal and his reformulation of his *History of Sexuality* with his history of modern subjectivity and techniques of subjectification.

However, while Elden's treatment stands out for its conceptual precision, it is surprising in its lack of any political contextualisation. His reading of the late Foucault is an entirely *internal* look at how the philosopher shifted from one idea to another. This offers a rather narrow account of Foucault's late evolution. Elden's 'history of thought' is impressively detailed, but it consistently fails to place the thinker's intellectual activity in a more general French intellectual context. Elden's Foucault is completely cut off from his broader political vision, attributing a highly exclusive role to detached scholarly motivation in his evolving concerns. The difficulty with this is that Foucault's turn to antiquity and the techniques of the self were not merely the result of a historical-antiquarian interest. He wanted to question France's own 'present' and rethink forms of criticism. As several contemporary scholars have argued, Foucault's 'interest in Greek, Roman and Christian antiquity' cannot be 'reduced to the project of a history of sexuality' alone. On the contrary, a careful reading of his interviews,

[18] Laura Cremonesi, Orazio Irrera, Daniele Lorenzini and Martina Tazzioli, eds., *Foucault and the Making of Subjects* (London: Rowan & Littlefield, 2016), 8.

[19] Michel Foucault, *L'origine de l'herméneutique de soi* (Paris: Vrin, 2013), 50.

[20] Henri-Paul Fruchaud and Daniele Lorenzini, 'Introduction', in Michel Foucault, *Dire Vrai sur soi-même* (Paris: Vrin, 2017), 20.

[21] Elden, *Foucault's Last Decade*, 127.

[22] Foucault, *Les Aveux de la chair*, 365.

[23] Michel Foucault, *The Will to Knowledge* (Middlesex: Penguin, 1981), 57.

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smaller texts and interventions, unveils 'the close link between his "scholarly" research and the "actuality"'.[24]

Especially for a figure like Foucault, we are entitled to ask how Elden can produce an accurate account of the work of a self-proclaimed 'historian of the present' by insisting on the complete unimportance of this specific present to Foucault's work. This, of course, concerns not only a question of contextual interpretation but also one of understanding Foucault's perspective in its own right. For Foucault historical problems were never exclusively 'historical', as Elden seems to think. They were also, as argued by Judith Revel, attempts to 'interrupt' the 'permanence' and the historic 'stability' of the present.[25] In a famous interview Foucault gave in 1980 about his recent books he went so far as to claim that he 'was not really an historian', that 'what [he] did was, from a historical point of view, partial, exaggerated' that he had even 'maybe ignored certain facts that would contradict [him]'. Instead, what mattered to him was rather that his books had 'a truth in the reality of today', that what he tried was to 'provoke an interference between our reality and what we know about our past history' and that, hopefully, this interference could 'produce real effects on our present history'. His goal, then, was 'that [his] books take their truth once written and not before'.[26]

In this sense, Elden's project fails on two levels. He fails to understand *how* Foucault wrote his history and *why* he did it. *How*, by excluding from his history the constant connection with the present that motivated Foucault. And *why* by hardly discussing his political project to reinvent subjectivity.

The 'Actuality' of Antiquity

If Elden's treatise does not provide us with an answer to the question of the 'actuality' of Foucault's last decade, other books discuss this in more innovative and promising terms.[27] One of these is Daniele Lorenzini, Arienne Revel and Arianna Sforzini's remarkable edited volume, *Michael Foucault: Éthique et vérité*. Rather than reading Foucault's interest for antiquity from an exclusively historical point of view, this volume shows how deeply political Foucault's concerns were. As the contributors argue, Foucault himself was scarcely interested in antiquity as a scholarly object *per se* but rather as a tool to think through our own relation to ourselves, to 'invent' new lifestyles. Arnold I. Davidson, for example, remarks that 'Foucault was not an *antiquisant* like the others, because he never gave up his principle of always starting from "a problem in the terms in which he is currently posed and [trying to] make a genealogy of it"'; he always intended to work 'from a present question'.[28] Similarly, as Jean-François Pradeau has argued, it is clear that for Foucault, 'the Ancients [are] only used to find the conditions of possibility' of a 'constitution of the self' foreign to the juridical model 'of a general law imposing itself on all individuals'.[29]

A crucial contextual explanation for Foucault's interests in this period lies in his intense fascination for the new forms of struggle in the 1970s that seemed to replace outdated

[24] Daniele Lorenzini, Arienne Revel and Arianna Sforzini, eds., *Michel Foucault. Éthique et vérité (1980–1984)* (Paris: Vrin, 2015), 10.

[25] Judith Revel, *Foucault avec Merleau-Ponty. Ontologie politique, présentisme et histoire* (Paris: Vrin, 2015), 77.

[26] Michel Foucault, 'Foucault étudie la raison d'État', in Michel Foucault, *Dits et écrits II. 1976–1984* (Paris: Gallimard, 2001), text no. 280.

[27] Lorenzini et al. *Michel Foucault*; Laura Cremonesi, Orazio Irrera, Daniele Lorenzini and Martina Tazzioli, eds., *Foucault and the Making of Subjects*, (London: Rowman & Littlefield, 2016); Revel, *Foucault avec Merleau-Ponty*; Daniele Lorenzini, *Ethique et politique de soi. Foucault, Hadot, Cavell et les techniques de l'ordinaire* (Paris: Vrin, 2015).

[28] Arnold I. Davidson, 'La fin de l'herméneutique de soi', in Lorenzini et al. *Michel Foucault*, 67.

[29] Jean-François Pradeau, 'Le sujet ancien d'une éthique moderne. A propos des exercices spirituels anciens dans l'Histoire de la sexualité', in Frédéric Gros, ed., *Foucault: Le courage de la vérité* (Paris: PUF, 2002), 147.

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'socialist' politics.[30] As he himself observed, socio-political struggles since the late sixties were no longer intended 'to attack a particular institution of power, or group, or class, or elite, but a particular technique, a form of power'.[31] This form of power is the one that influences an everyday life, 'which classifies individuals into categories and defines their own individuality, attaches them to their identity'.[32] The main task of the struggles of the seventies and eighties was therefore to 'promote new forms of subjectivity by refusing the kind of individuality that has been imposed on us during several centuries'.[33] Emerging forms of protest were, in Foucault's eyes, a consequence of the fact that what 'institutions proposed to us is not satisfactory'.[34] This meant that, as he put it at the 1977 Forum 'Vivre à gauche', organised by members of the French 'Second Left', 'innovation does not pass through parties, trade unions, bureaucracy and politics anymore. It comes from an individual, moral concern'.[35] He went on to describe 'new social movements' as movements against subjection (*assujetissement*).

Seen from this perspective, it is clear that if 'Christian subjectivity is particularly relevant' to Foucault, it is precisely because 'it provides the pattern for our modern way of becoming subjects'.[36] Christian techniques of confession and conduct had been 'reproduced and secularised by the modern arts of governing, through the actions of psychiatric, medical and judicial apparatus'.[37] For Foucault, this genealogy explains why truth plays a central role in our procedures of government, like in the justice system, the psychiatric and medical apparatus and the human sciences, all of which revolve around an obligation of truth for the subject and the constitution of a certain type of relation to oneself. This genealogy also explains how a 'regime of truth' emerged 'which require[d] from the individual to say not only "here I am, me who obeys", but in addition "this is what I am, me who obeys"'.[38] The Christian hermeneutics of the self were, for Foucault, 'at the origin of the genealogy of modern subjectivity',[39] and his fascination for the Age of Antiquity offered 'a way of constituting the subjectivity which is radically different from the Christian one'.[40] He therefore read the entirety of ancient philosophy, as Davidson argues, as an attempt 'to bring out alternatives to the yoke of the hermeneutics of the self, to show us that a concrete alternative existed and, therefore, that nothing makes unimaginable the work of invention that will create a new alternative, by undoing our own subjection'.[41] In such a configuration, antiquity becomes a 'laboratory' to think about alternative forms of subject formation.

Interestingly, Foucault himself made exactly the same claim in a discussion at the history department in Berkeley in April 1983:

> The problem is not at all to return to this Greco-Roman ethic since part of ours is coming from it. But we know that it is possible to carry out an ethical research, to build a new ethic, to make room for what I should call the ethical imagination, without any reference to religion,

[30] For a detailed view of Foucault's relation to the French socialism, see Serge Audier, *Penser le 'néolibéralisme': le moment néolibéral, Foucault et la crise du socialisme* (Paris: Le bord de l'eau, 2015).

[31] Michel Foucault, 'The Subject and Power', in Hubert Dreyfus and Paul Rabinow, *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1982), 208–26.

[32] Foucault, 'The Subject and Power'.

[33] Ibid.

[34] Foucault, *Qu'est ce que la critique?*, 120.

[35] Michel Foucault, 'Une mobilisation culturelle', *Le Nouvel Observateur*, 670, 12–18 Sept. (1977), 49. Available online at http://1libertaire.free.fr/MFoucault344.html (last visited 6 Sept. 2018).

[36] Cremonesi et al. *Foucault and the making of subjects*, 8.

[37] Ibid.

[38] Daniele Lorenzini, 'Foucault, Regimes of Truth and the Making of the Subject', in Cremonesi et al., *Foucault and the making of subject*, 67.

[39] Arnold I. Davidson, 'La fin de l'Herméneutique de soi', 68.

[40] Cremonesi et al. *Foucault and the making of subjects*, 8.

[41] Ibid., 73.

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law and science. And it is for this reason that, I believe, this analysis of Greco-Roman ethics may be of interest.[42]

The genealogy of the modern subject was also a way to think about, like the German *Aufklärung* in Foucault's famous lecture on Enlightenment, 'who are we, at this precise moment in history?'.

What, then, explains the relative lack of attention to the 'actual' and contemporaneous inflection of Foucault's scholarly work in his final decade? One of the reasons can be found in the fact that, until recently, readings of his famous text 'What is Enlightenment?' were generally disconnected from the rest of his oeuvre.[43] Although Foucault's most famous text was published in 1984, he was already thinking about the topic in 1978 in a lecture he gave at the Sorbonne entitled 'What is Criticism?' (*Qu'est-ce que la critique?*).[44] In this lecture Foucault defined critique as 'the movement by which the subject gives himself the right to question the truth about its effects of power and the power over his discourse of truth'. It would then have as main function 'the desubjectification in the game of what might be called, in a word, the politics of truth'.[45]

Foucault's 'critical attitude' towards the German 'Enlightenment' (*Aufklärung*) was part of his broader aim of disarticulating the 'bundle of relationships that ties . . . power, truth and the subject'.[46] In this view, subjectivity no longer involves seeking the limits of knowledge but of constituting a more autonomous relation to oneself in regard to modern forms of subjectivation/subjection. Foucault's critical study of antique 'techniques of the self' and of critical attitudes found in the tradition of *Aufklärung* thus drew together a new way of conceiving power and of resisting it. From here on, the question was not to 'liberate' people from power but rather to invent, within the matrix of existing power relations and positioned on the narrow margin of freedom that we do possess, new forms of subjectivity and new capacities for self-transformation. That is exactly what Foucault was referring to when he talked, in the 1970s, of 'creating cultural forms' and 'invent[ing] new gay lifestyles'.[47] Foucault realised that opening up new spaces of freedom and experimentation, or new forms of liberty within power, was vital to the project of going beyond the hermeneutics of the self. This could then provide an alternative to the slow collapse of French socialism and its 'state-centred' conception of social transformation.

Foucault Between 'Rights' and 'Neoliberalism'

Within Foucault's theory of subject agency and resistance, his interest in the politics of rights and in neoliberal governmentality is of particular importance. Both of these subjects offered useful frameworks that could be used to expand the margins of liberty and constitute an 'aesthetic of existence'.

In the 1970s the discourse of human rights became more preeminent in French politics, in line with a general 'anti-totalitarian' and 'liberal' moment, concerning, especially, the rights of Eastern European dissidents.[48] By the late 1970s Foucault, too, was increasingly mobilising a discourse on rights in his numerous political interventions.[49] Against the 'old right of sovereignty' he now

[42] Foucault, *Qu'est ce que la critique?*, 143.

[43] Michel Foucault, 'What is Enlightenment?' in Paul Rabinow, ed., *The Foucault Reader* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1984), 32–50.

[44] Foucault, *Qu'est ce que la critique?*.

[45] Ibid., 39.

[46] Foucault, *L'origine de l'herméneutique de soi*, 37n.

[47] Michel Foucault, 'The Social Triumph of the Sexual Will: A Conversation with Michel Foucault', *Christopher Street*, 6, 4 (1982), 36–41.

[48] See especially Michael Scott Christofferson, *French Intellectuals Against the Left. The antitotalitarian moment of the 1970s* (New York: Berghahn, 2004).

[49] The most famous example is probably the lecture he gave in 1981. Michel Foucault, 'Face aux gouvernements, les droits de l'homme', *Libération*, 967, 30 June–1 July (1984), 22. Available online at http://1libertaire.free.fr/MFoucault162.html (last visited 6 Sept. 2018).

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insisted on a newly instituted 'right of the governed', calling, for example, for 'immediate measures . . . [to] eliminate all abuses of rights in the way the law is applied' to prison inmates.[50] This evolution in his language has frequently been interpreted as further proof of Foucault's turn away from his earlier anti-humanism.[51]

But Ben Golder has a different take in his insightful recent book, *Foucault and the Politics of Rights*, which goes beyond Elden's detached 'history of thought'. Golder asks if Foucault's 'late work on rights . . . [can] plausibly be understood as a retreat to a politics of liberalism and a normative definition of the individual against the power of the state or of other individuals'.[52] His answer to this question is that we should understand Foucault's use of the language of rights within his more general critique of traditional conceptions of sovereign power. Golder argues that Foucault's opposition to the 'juridico-discursive' conception of power starts with the realisation that the subject is not something *external* to power, repressed by it, but rather generated within it. To Foucault, he claims, it is clear that 'subjects cannot be ontologically separated from or straightforwardly opposed to the relations of power from which they need protection or sheltering'.[53]

This duality at the heart of power itself would receive further attention in the 1978 and 1979 lectures on the topics of Christian pastorate and neoliberalism. Foucault gave these as he himself was moving 'from a study of practices of objectification (discipline and biopolitics) to a study of practices of self-initiated subjectification (ethics)'.[54] The neologism of 'governmentality' offered a way to understand power as a subtle 'mix . . . of technologies of constraint and technologies of the self'.[55] Steadily, two sides of the same coin emerged. As the editors of *Foucault and the Making of Subjects* put it, these two domains are 'the action of power upon the individuals in order to shape their subjectivity (the dimension of the conduct and government of the others)', and, concomitantly, 'the action of individuals upon themselves in order to contrast such a power (the dimension of the conduct and government of oneself)'.[56]

This duality was crucial to how Foucault himself began to read new forms of resistance. Before the 1970s Foucault did not have at his disposal a concept of 'power' or of the 'subject' that could open the space for any form of resistance to power. Foucault thought then, as noted by Andrew Dilts, that he had perhaps given 'too much attention . . . to the ways in which subjects are formed by power, and are seemingly left without agency to respond to that power'.[57] Yet, with his genealogy of governmentality, Foucault began to show how techniques of the Christian pastorate shaped modern forms of power and, at the same time, how they would come to generate, within this very field of power, several kinds of 'counter-conducts' as movements of insubordination and resistance. This made him think about power in a new way. He began to consider that, within any form of conduct and governmentality, there is always 'the immanent possibility of a counter-conduct'. In short, that 'power and resistance' are always 'interlocked'.[58] According to Golder, the aim for Foucault was to

> excavate the hidden margin of freedom immanent to all contingent human arrangements, and what it thereby demonstrates is the sustaining possibility of their being otherwise than they are now, so as to show, as Foucault puts it, that people are 'much freer than they feel'.[59]

[50] Foucault quoted in Ben Golder, *Foucault and the Politics of Rights*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2015), 15.
[51] For a more detailed discussion on the status of the subject in Foucault's thought, see especially the classic reference work on the topic, Peter Dews 'The Return of the Subject in Late Foucault', *Radical Philosophy*, 51 (Spring 1989), 37–41.
[52] Golder, *Foucault and the Politics of Rights*, 62.
[53] Ibid., 9.
[54] Ibid., 51.
[55] Foucault, *L'origine de l'herméneutique de soi*, 39.
[56] Cremonesi et al., *Foucault and the making of subjects*, 7
[57] Andrew Dilts, 'From 'entrepreneur of the self' to 'care of the self': neo-liberal governmentality and Foucault's ethics', *Foucault Studies*, 12 (2011), 141.
[58] Golder, *Foucault and the Politics of Rights*, 57.
[59] Ibid., 58.

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Resistance is always a 'struggle from within', which explains why Foucault does not need to accept a normative definition of the individual to use the language of rights. Rather, as Golder argues, 'rights are simultaneously vehicles for political claiming and sites of regulatory control'.[60] Much like his attempt to both remain *within* and agitate *against* the Christian pastorate, Foucault envisioned a 'critical counter-conduct of rights', where citizens could attempt 'to use elements of that discourse in a transgressive and destabilising way against their dominant meanings'.[61] Here, Golder adds, rights can 'enlarge, expand, or protect the sphere of action of subjects (as well as performatively bring new worlds and communities into being)'.[62] Thanks to Golder's exposition, we can now see more clearly why Foucault believed that rights could become 'tactical means' to expand and 'pluralise' our possible relations to ourselves, and 'carve out' spaces of experimentation.

The second key question in recent studies of Foucault has been about his relation to neoliberalism. While partially resulting from the same intellectual developments that have led to a reassessment of his discussion of rights, this debate has been treated rather hastily by most scholars. Some, like Elden, have simply argued that any suggestive claim of either sympathy or opposition on behalf of Foucault regarding neoliberalism is simply 'flawed'. For him, the focus of Foucault is strictly 'historical rather than political'.[63] Remaining much more cautious when broaching the subject, Ben Golder qualifies the controversial initial essay of Michael Behrent on Foucault's 'strategic endorsement' of neoliberalism as 'provocative' and 'powerful'.[64] However, he immediately adds that he disagrees with the analysis and thinks Behrent 'mistakes the genealogical tone of the 1979 lecture for fascination and normative approval' and 'overplays what he perceives as Foucault's normative opposition to the state and state power'. For Golder, it is therefore clear that Foucault is in no way attempting to 'evacuate' or 'reject' the state, but rather to 'problematise' it.[65]

In their recent *State Phobia and Civil Society. The Political Legacy of Michel Foucault*, Mitchell Dean and Kaspar Villadsen tackle this controversy directly. For Dean and Villadsen, looking at the relation of Foucault with neoliberalism through the monochromatic prism of anti-statism is a misleading endeavour. The authors argue for a perspective that mixes 'a theoretical and analytical anti-statism with a critique of state phobia'.[66] To grasp this ambivalent relationship, it is necessary to understand his relationship to the state within a more general interest in techniques of subjection. Foucault's concern was more about the state as 'a matrix of individualisation or a new form of pastoral power'.[67] For Foucault, 'the problem at the same time political, ethical, social and philosophical we are facing today is not to try to free the individual from the state and its institutions, but to free it from the State and the type of individualisation associated with it'.[68] Much in the same way that we should not insist on 'liberating' sexuality, we should not talk in terms of getting rid of the state but refusing the forms of normalisation it imposes on our lives.

As Dean and Villadsen note, 'Foucault's problematic is not one that seeks a freedom from all sorts of power but rather an alternative to particular kinds of power and regulation', especially those which impose a certain relation to ourselves. In this way, Foucault's concern with statism and his interest in neoliberalism meshed with what Golder describes as his more general aim to creates spaces for a more autonomous self. Dean and Villadsen help us to understand that

[60] Ibid., 92.
[61] Ibid., 96.
[62] Ibid., 91.
[63] Stuart Elden, *Foucault's Last Decade*, 103.
[64] Michael Behrent, 'Liberalism without Humanism: Michel Foucault and the Free-Market Creed, 1976–1979', *Modern Intellectual History*, 6, 3 (2009), 539–68.
[65] Golder, *Foucault and the Politics of Rights*, 188n.
[66] Mitchell Dean and Kaspar Villadsen, *Statephobia and Civil Society* (London: Stanford University Press, 2016).
[67] Foucault, 'The Subject and Power', 215.
[68] Ibid.

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Foucault sees neoliberalism not as political program but rather as a framework, a useful 'governmentality' which might prove capable of limiting existing state techniques of subjugation. The authors claim that 'American neoliberalism' is, for Foucault, an 'alternative to the other new kinds of power and regulation he had analysed' and not their simple continuation by other means. As Foucault wrote in 1979,

> you can see that what appears on the horizon of this kind of analysis is not at all the idea or project of an exhaustively disciplinary society in which the legal network hemming in individuals is taken over and extended internally by, let's say, normative mechanisms. Nor is it a society in which a mechanism of general normalisation and the exclusion of those who cannot be normalised is needed'. . . . On the horizon of this analysis we see instead the image, idea, or theme-program of a society in which there is an optimisation of systems of difference, in which the field is left open to fluctuating processes, in which minority individuals and practices are tolerated, in which action is brought to bear on the rules of the game rather than on the players, and finally in which there is an environmental type of intervention instead of the internal subjugation of individuals.[69]

In short, neoliberalism, as a 'technology of the environment', offers 'a massive withdrawal with regard to the normative-disciplinary system' of liberal governmentality.

For Dean and Villadsen the crucial point here is that Foucault differentiates between 'external' and 'internal' forms of subjugation. While old forms of power indexed the subject to a certain truth about itself (and produced the subject internally), neoliberalism only shapes the environment in which the subject evolves. Such rules of the game, therefore, in opposition to classical forms of disciplinary power, cannot be conceived as 'decisions which someone takes for others' but instead as a general framework giving a more or less open field of possibilities. The rules are indeed imposed on players, but the players themselves 'remain free in their game'.[70] The result, as Dean has recently argued in another essay, is that Foucault seems to think that 'neoliberalism offers us instead is a way out of subjectification, a way out of the double bind that ties the production of who we are to our domination, the making of subjectivity to subjugation'.[71] The crucial point for him about this new governmentality is that it could create a framework that would allow certain forms of pluralism and autonomy in the subject's relation to itself.

If we follow this line of argument, neoliberalism was a useful way to get out of the hermeneutics of the self and potentially expand the conditions in which we could 'invent' ourselves. As François Ewald has recently noted, if Foucault's aim was to find a governmentality that could 'be free from morality and from the law', he actually found in the work of the economist Gary Becker a 'possibility of thinking about power without discipline', a 'theory of regulation' that made it possible 'to conduct the behaviour of the other without coercion, by incitation'.[72] As Foucault himself argued about Becker's writings, 'considering the subject as *homo oeconomicus* does not imply an anthropological identification of any behaviour whatsoever with economic behaviour'. In the eyes of Foucault, neoliberalism led to an 'anthropological erasing' in its understanding of human actions.[73]

Nevertheless, there was a deep theoretical solidarity between the rise of neoliberalism as a form of governmentality and Foucault's plea for inventing new subjectivities. Neoliberalism seemed to open spaces to deploy new ways of life and offer a framework open to a more

[69] Michel Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 259–60.

[70] Ibid., 260n.

[71] Mitchell Dean, 'Foucault and the Neoliberalism Controversy' in Damien Cahill, Melinda Cooper, Martijn Konings and David Primrose, eds., *The Sage Handbook of Neoliberalism* (New York: Sage, 2018), 40–54.

[72] Gary Becker, François Ewald and Bernard Harcourt, '"Becker on Ewald on Foucault on Becker": American Neoliberalism and Michel Foucault's 1979 "Birth of Biopolitics" Lectures' (Coase-Sandor Institute for Law and Economics Working Paper No. 614, 2012), 7.

[73] Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics*, 258.

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autonomous ethic. The effects of a certain configuration between state power and the forms of subjugation was very different under neoliberalism than in the old Gaullist and statist France in which Foucault had come of age. And, as the intellectual historian Serge Audier has observed, even if a neoliberal French state was not automatically better than its previous dirigiste incarnation, it still, 'offered margins of freedom, especially for minority practices – drugs, sex, refusal to work, etc.'.[74]

What, then, of the exact status of Foucault's neoliberal moment? The best way to describe it might be to see neoliberalism as another attractive framework for Foucault to go beyond the Christian hermeneutics of the self and stimulate the proliferation of different lifestyles. Neoliberal governmentality was a fascinating anti-normative framework that could break with all past systems of *assujetissement* inherited from Christianity, as well as help people to think about the subject and its autonomy as a form of resistance. In this reading Foucault's turn towards ancient Greece and his study of neoliberalism, far from constituting disconnected moments in his scholarly and activist career, both emerged as different means to subvert our present, to displace the space of politics beyond macro-economic structures towards the subjects themselves and to constitute his 'aesthetics of existence'. On the one hand, antiquity offered the proof that other arrangements of selfhood have indeed existed. On the other, neoliberal governmentality could open new spaces for experimentation with novel forms of interpersonal relations. If, as Revel notes, 'we will never leave history', the late Foucault did at least believe that we might be able to 'experiment' in its midst.[75]

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[74] Serge Audier, 'Quand Foucault découvre le néolibéralisme, Prophétie géniale ou symptôme d'une crise de la gauche?', in Daniel Zamora and Michael C. Behrent, *Foucault et le néolibéralisme* (Brussels: Aden, 2018).

[75] Revel, *Foucault avec Merleau-Ponty*, 51.

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