

Review Essay

C. G. Prado's *Searle and Foucault on Truth*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006; 184 pages.

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In *Searle and Foucault on Truth*, C. G. Prado undertakes a comparative study of John Searle's and Michel Foucault's analyses of truth. As Prado notes, this is not a book that is likely to make many people happy: analytic philosophers who are interested in Searle will have little interest in the parts of the book that consider the work of Foucault, while continental philosophers are likely to have little interest in reading Prado's discussions of Searle. Nevertheless it is precisely this division of readers into two camps that Prado wishes to problematize, for the self-described goal of Prado's juxtaposition of the two philosophers is nothing less than a "*rapprochement*" between continental and analytic philosophy. Prado argues that reading Foucault's and Searle's discussions of truth together reveals more similarities than we might have anticipated, and, as he states by way of conclusion, "the contrastive comparison of Searle and Foucault shows us that we cannot hope to get all of these things said clearly and correctly if we listen to and read only philosophers working our favored side of the canonical and priority divides" (173).

Prado has undertaken a *rapprochement* of analytic and continental philosophy in earlier books, most notably in *A House Divided: Comparing Analytic and Continental Philosophy* (2003), but also in *Starting with Foucault: An Introduction to Genealogy* (2000). The latter work compares Foucault's philosophy to that of the pragmatist Richard Rorty, for instance, and is aimed at introducing Foucault to an analytic audience. *Searle and Foucault on Truth* once again compares Prado's favorite continental philosopher to an analytic philosopher, but this time comparison is made to what would seem to be a far less amenable candidate: John Searle.

In the first chapter of *Searle and Foucault on Truth*, Prado provides a general account of what he calls the "canonical" and "priority" divides which characterize the current state of philosophy. The canonical divide—which is more often discussed but which Prado considers less consequential—lies between the analytic and continental schools of philosophy. The priority divide—which, Prado argues, is less often remarked but more fundamental than the canonical divide—lies between philosophy as an historical versus an ahistorical discipline. As Prado notes, there are more philosophers who approach knowledge, truth, reason, and philosophy historically on the continental side of the canonical divide, and

more philosophers who see these as ahistorical or universal on the analytic side, however the canonical and priority divides do not match up entirely. In this initial chapter, Prado offers a fair encapsulation and appraisal of continental and analytic philosophy, although one notes that he draws on works such as Simon Critchley's *Continental Philosophy: A Very Short Introduction* in order to characterize continental philosophy, while he is better versed in analytic philosophy and does not need to draw on similar works to discuss this side of the canonical divide.

The second and third chapters of *Searle and Foucault on Truth* are devoted to summarizations of the philosophies, and stances on truth, of Searle and Foucault respectively. In Chapter Two we are introduced to Searle's philosophy in general before Prado hones in on Searle's philosophy of truth. Prado provides brief and useful accounts of Searle's theories of language, mind, and social reality, and then a more in-depth study of Searle's realist theory of truth. As Prado explains, Searle deems it embarrassing to need to say that an external world exists, and that it is relations to this world which makes certain statements or sentences true or false. Although he acknowledges that we see the world through particular perspectives, this does not mean, for Searle, that we do not see the world directly, much as we see a chair directly, even if we see it from a certain angle based on our own situation in the room. As Prado acknowledges, Searle's simplistic theory of truth is facilitated by the simple examples which he draws on, such as seeing a chair, or seeing keys on a table.

Chapter Three begins by presenting Foucault's philosophy to the uninitiated reader, introducing key concepts such as archaeology and genealogy, before approaching the subject of truth in Foucault's work. While in introducing Searle, Prado's audience could have been any novice reader of Searle, whether analytic or continental in training and inclination, in introducing Foucault it becomes clear that Prado is concerned with addressing an analytic audience in particular, and with dispelling its preconceptions about Foucault. For instance, Prado wishes to debunk the notion that Foucault is just like Derrida, which is not a typical misunderstanding on the part of many continental readers.

Unfortunately, the tactic that Prado takes in defending Foucault to an analytic audience is to argue that Foucault is worthwhile reading because he is not like other continental and postmodern philosophers. In taking this line of defense Prado seems to agree with his analytic peers that continental philosophy in general is not worth reading, even if he differs from them in thinking that Foucault's works are an exception to this rule. For instance, Prado writes that "unlike most of his postmodern peers, who offer only criticism of traditional methods, objectives, and assumptions, Foucault's conception of power relations makes his relativism

and his rejection of objective standards worthy of serious consideration" (67). But who are these postmodern peers who only offer criticisms? Prado does not say. Whoever they are, it seems that for Prado the works of most postmodern philosophers are not "worthy of serious consideration."

The only one of Foucault's "postmodern peers" to whom Prado refers by name is Derrida, and yet, without exception, every time that he does so it is to cite or refer to Derrida's oft-quoted and oft-misunderstood line: "there is nothing outside the text." Prado refers to this sentence from *Of Grammatology* repeatedly throughout his book, each time to dismiss Derrida as a "linguistic idealist" and to reassure the reader that Foucault is not a "Derridean deconstructivist." Derrida's position on truth, although not explored in any detail, is taken to be self-evidently untenable, a cliché and foil for the more complex analyses of truth that interest Prado. The burden is thus taken to be to remove the misconception in the minds of Prado's analytic peers that Foucault is to be dismissed offhand as a "Derridean deconstructivist" (a label that I confess I have never heard ascribed to Foucault). To do this, Prado takes great care to offer an admirably nuanced and complex reading of discussions and uses of truth in a wide variety of Foucault's texts, and yet he does not extend this same care to reading Derrida, but simply accepts in Derrida's case the sort of simplistic misreading that he challenges in the case of Foucault. However, had Prado read Derrida's claim in context, he would have realized that Derrida is *not* saying that there is no world outside the text, but rather that we never have *access* to that world unmediated by language. Moreover, had Prado attended to more than one sentence in Derrida's corpus, he would have realized that one can give as complex an account of truth in Derrida as one can in Foucault. For instance, Prado might find Derrida's essay, "History of the Lie" (*Without Alibi* 28–70), a text on historical truths and falsehoods, to be a text that is indeed "worthy of serious consideration."

Prado notes in this chapter that "In the end, labels do little to promote understanding of Foucault's work," as Foucault is "a truly innovative philosopher" (69). Prado makes this claim in the context of the debate over whether Foucault was ever a "structuralist" and later a "post-structuralist." Nevertheless, as seen, Prado goes on to underscore repeatedly the importance of dispelling the notion that Foucault is a "Derridean deconstructivist," and this because Foucault is, according to Prado, not a "linguistic idealist" or an "irrealist" but rather a "tacit-realist." As such, Prado does not dispense with labeling Foucault, or with attempting to promote an understanding of Foucault's work by fitting him into pre-given categories of philosophical thought. Prado is only quick to dismiss labeling Foucault according to *continental* labels such as

"post-structuralist," but is heartset on categorizing Foucault under analytic labels, and that of "realist" in particular. One begins to suspect that in this *rapprochement* it is the continental philosopher who must be made to speak English, and not Searle who must be shown to speak a little French.

A discussion of Foucault's "realism" arises when Prado moves from a general discussion of Foucault's philosophy to a discussion of his analysis of truth in particular. Here things become more complicated, for, unlike Searle, Foucault cannot be attributed with a single, straightforward "theory" of truth. Rather, according to Prado, we can discern five distinct "uses" of truth in Foucault, four of which are explicit, and one of which is tacit. Prado has already delineated these five uses of truth in Foucault in *Starting with Foucault: An Introduction to Genealogy*, but in his latest book he reiterates and nuances his account of the five uses of truth. It is worth doing so for however much we may want to debate the so-called fifth "tacit-realist" use of truth in Foucault, Prado's clear account of four *explicit* uses of truth in Foucault is certainly one of his most useful contributions to Foucault scholarship. These four explicit uses of truth are the criterial use, the constructivist use, the perspectivist use, and the experiential use.

While I find Prado's distinction between the four explicit uses of truth in Foucault to be helpful and insightful, his claim that there is a fifth, tacit-realist use of truth in Foucault seems highly debatable. The examples that Prado provides of instances where Foucault slips and refers to truth in a tacit-realist sense are not convincing. Most of them date to an earlier, archaeological period in Foucault's work, and not the genealogical period upon which Prado claims to be focusing, and could moreover be explained as criterial uses of truth. Although Prado acknowledges that some passages in Foucault's work might lead one to believe that he does in fact think that there is no truth outside of discourse, Prado insists that things are more complicated, and attempts to prove this by frequently citing Foucault's statement, made in an interview, that he is not claiming that "everything comes out of somebody's head." Prado interprets this to mean that things come from an extralinguistic reality for Foucault, although nothing suggests this. After all, there are not only two options: "inside somebody's head" or "extralinguistic reality." There are, for instance, the workings of discourse and power which are not master-minded within any particular person's head, but which are not an extralinguistic reality in Searle's sense either. It might be harder than Prado thinks, therefore, to prove that Foucault thinks there is truth outside of discourse, even if "discourse" is not just inside "somebody's head."

Chapters Four and Five compare Foucault's and Searle's analyses of truth, as these have been described in Chapters Two and Three, and attempt to show similarities between the two theories. A broader methodological question that one might ask here is: why do the two philosophers have to be shown to be saying the same thing (at least in part) in order for there to be a conversation or a *rapprochement* between the two halves of a divided philosophical community? Is sameness the only basis for dialogue? Must the obscuration of difference be the grounds for communication? Continental philosophers and communication scholars such as Amit Pinchevski, drawing on the ethical and political thought of Levinas and Derrida, have argued, on the contrary, that it is alterity that gives rise to the possibility of ethical communication, while the insistence that both sides say the same thing before they can begin to speak is in fact a denial of the very possibility of ethical communication (Pinchevski, *By Way of Interruption: Levinas and the Ethics of Communication*, 2005). One might question, therefore, why Prado thinks that he needs to prove that Foucault is saying, at least in part, the same thing that analytic philosophers say, if continental and analytic philosophers are to begin to speak to one another at all.

However, these significant methodological considerations aside, Prado seems to assume that he must show similarities between an analytic and a continental philosopher if there is to be any genuine communication between the two halves of this house divided. The possibility for such a *rapprochement* is primarily based on the fifth tacit-realist use of truth in Foucault which, for Prado, bears comparison to Searle's realism. As seen, however, this is the use of truth in Foucault that is debatable and which, as Prado himself frequently notes and explains, Foucault himself found irrelevant for his own purposes and refrained from elaborating upon, even when asked explicitly to do so in interviews. Prado indeed shows a sophisticated understanding of the reasons for which Foucault was uninterested in discussing truth in the realist sense, and why he continually shifted the conversation to the four explicit uses of truth which Prado has described. Although recognizing that Foucault had no interest in the question of realism, and appreciative of the reasons for which Foucault wanted to change the sorts of questions we ask about truth, Prado nevertheless insists throughout these chapters on posing the old question of realism in terms of Foucault's work.

In Chapter Five, I think that Prado ends up conceding that an acknowledgement of "reality" in Foucault, if there is one, is not a "use of truth." At the end of his book, Prado compares Foucault's attitude towards reality to Richard Rorty's discussion of factuality. For Rorty, factuality, or the resistance of the world, is whatever we are not talking about at the moment, but as soon as we start talking about the "facts,"

we are adding something, and are in the realm of truth claims, not mere reality. Prado may be insightful in arguing that Foucault, similarly, would not deny reality, or the resistance of the world, but that he distinguishes this non-discursive reality from truth, which is always discursive. In *Psychiatric Power*, for instance, which includes what Foucault calls "a history of truth" (and which Prado does not mention), Foucault discusses reality and truth as two distinct things, although it is fairly clear in this text that "reality" is even more of a product of relations of power and authoritative discourses than is "truth." But even if we were to grant that Foucault assumes a non-discursive "reality" which is distinct from truth, it does not follow that this assumption of reality is a "use of truth" in Foucault, precisely because, as Prado's argument goes, Foucault wants to *distinguish* reality from truth. Oddly, however, after Prado acknowledges that truth is distinct from reality in Foucault, he goes on calling Foucault's assumption of reality a "use of truth." But if reality is distinct from truth, realism is not a use of truth, but an assumption of something apart from truth, and there would seem to be no realist use of truth in Foucault at all. Indeed, Prado has recently stated that he has come to "realize that the tacit realism ... I attributed to Foucault should be stated in terms like I use about Rorty and factuality and should not be a (fifth) sense of truth at all—tacit or otherwise" (personal correspondence). This revised view on Prado's part is to be reflected in a forthcoming article.

Unfortunately, if we disagree with Prado's claim that there is a realist use of truth in Foucault—as Prado himself now disagrees with this claim—then the tenuous point of comparison with Searle more or less dissolves, and we are left with even more tenuous reasons to compare the two philosophers, such as the observations which Prado makes that both men discuss *Las Meninas* and both have taken a derisive and scornful attitude towards Derrida (25).

I would now like to take up the discussion of truth in Foucault which appears in the work of a very different Foucault scholar, Ladelle McWhorter, in order to contrast it with Prado's account. In "Foucault's Analytics of Power," McWhorter argues that we should consider Foucault's analysis of power, which presents power as reciprocal, productive, diffuse, and multiple, not as a *description* of how power *truly* is, or as the truth of power, but as a strategy. Foucault's analysis of power does not aim to prove more traditional accounts of power false, and itself true, in other words, but works as a movement of thinking, a means to get through the barrier which is traditional political thought, a way of opening up thought so that we can think, and recreate the present, otherwise (McWhorter 1990). McWhorter concludes her article by stating that "If this strategy is effective,"

We will be in a discourse where requests for true definitions, demands for timeless justifications, and salvific appeals will not hold very much sway. And all this means that we will most decidedly not remain within the discourses of political theory or of Foucault commentary as they each stand today (126).

Nine years later, in *Bodies and Pleasures: Foucault and the Politics of Sexual Normalization*, McWhorter again approaches the topics of truth and power in Foucault's genealogical writings (McWhorter 1999). She describes the way in which she at first took Foucault's genealogy of the sexual sciences to be a true description of how things are. She was initially happy to think that what the sexual sciences said about her, as a lesbian, were untrue, and that Foucault's account in contrast was true, and she could thus know who she really was. Quickly, however, McWhorter realized that, for Foucault, genealogies do not provide timeless, universal, or essential truths any more than do the stories they refute. Genealogies offer alternative accounts, which, like the alternative account of power that Foucault provides, serve more to destabilize established truths than to establish themselves as true in turn. Foucault once called himself a "seller of tools"; his genealogies are not the truth but are rather tools for changing oneself and society in the present, and are then to be dispensed with. Foucault is more interested in his genealogies being *useful* than being true. Accordingly, "Timeless, universal truth does not enter into the picture at all on this construal. Foucault can avoid saying anything about the true meaning of *truth*, because universal truth at the genealogical level is simply irrelevant" (McWhorter 1999, 49).

As McWhorter makes clear, this does not mean that we can have no knowledge or no truths. We must simply accept that the truths we have are only true given our own "justificatory standards," or are not true in some universal sense. In Prado's terms, they are true in the criterial sense, or true given our criteria for truth. For instance, Foucault's genealogies provide a certain kind of knowledge because they conform to our justificatory standards for knowledge. Foucault's genealogies conform, for the most part, to the justificatory standards for historical arguments by providing documents and dates, drawing on empirical evidence and painstaking research carried out in archives. Because these genealogies meet our criteria for historical knowledge, Foucault's genealogies can be said to provide us with such knowledge, while also showing that much of what had previously passed as true—the stories that Foucault's genealogies aim to refute—did not live up to these justificatory standards for knowledge. While we, like McWhorter on her first reading of Foucault, may at first be tempted to take Foucault's genealogies as the ultimate

truth on the subject matter they discuss, truths that debunk the falsities that we were told before, Foucault makes clear that his genealogies are politically motivated, perspectival, and are only true given certain cultural and discipline-contingent standards for truth which he meets.

Although, in our enthusiasm for the stories Foucault tells, we may at first be destabilized and even disappointed by the realization that, for Foucault, his own stories are better understood as strategies for opening up thought, for undermining established truths, than as stable truths in their own right, we might also feel liberated by the destruction of foundational claims which sets up no new foundation in their place. Although at first worried by the threat of nihilism that Foucault's text pose, McWhorter soon found that she reveled in the freedom of thought they opened up, saying that she reads Foucault's texts for the same reason she watches Schwarzenegger movies, for the pleasure of seeing things blow up (McWhorter 1999, 62), and titles a *Hypatia* article "Revenge of a Gay Nihilist" (2001). In the rubble of what Foucault's genealogies blow up, McWhorter "dissolves into peals of laughter." As she notes, "It was all very injudicious, but I couldn't help myself" (McWhorter 1999, 57).

To laugh, to laugh at the destruction of established truths and apparently inevitable ways of thinking, is what Foucault wants us to do when we read his books—Foucault who is himself continually described bursting into laughter in interviews, laughing out loud as he reads Borges's account of the Chinese Encyclopedia, and fascinated by the subversive laughter of Pierre Rivière. However, there are those who read Foucault's texts and do not laugh, do not delight in seeing established truths blown up, and who want to know: but what is really true? And, what is truth?

In *Searle and Foucault on Truth*, Prado struggles to know whether Foucault would say that it is true that water expands when it freezes. Of course, Foucault could say that of course this is true, given the justificatory standards for truth of the empirical sciences. We can freeze water, and observe that it expands, and so, by the criteria for scientific truth which we all accept, including Foucault, this is a true statement. We could also note that Foucault occasionally refers in passing to the claims of the hard sciences as unproblematic facts, which is in strict contrast to his view of the social and psychological sciences—the sciences that interest him. Yet Foucault does not give Prado what he wants, which is an explicit statement that there are timeless, universal truths, discoverable by science or otherwise. We have seen that McWhorter believes that if we read Foucault's genealogies as they are meant to be read, "universal truth does not enter into the picture at all" and is "simply irrelevant," and thus "requests for true definitions, demands for timeless justifications, and salvific appeals will not hold very much sway." This

would mean a new phase of Foucault commentary, for McWhorter, one in which we no longer try to make Foucault's texts "safe for analytic epistemology," or contort these texts to answer questions about universal truth which they purposefully avoid. As McWhorter writes, "To make Foucault's texts safe for analytic epistemology is to refuse to think with the texts, to refuse the thinking that the texts seek to usher in" (McWhorter 1999, 57). "But to give oneself over to the text and to think with it," McWhorter recognizes, "is to risk a radical loss":

The kind of thinking the text sets in motion endangers the very subject who undertakes to think. To think with a genealogical text is to give oneself, as knower, over to the process of self-overcoming, self-violation, and live within the de-centering of a way of being whose existence requires constant centrality (57).

As Prado's text moves back and forth between trying to force Foucault to answer analytic epistemological questions, to respond to Searle, for instance, and explaining why Foucault did not ever provide answers to these sorts of questions, why he did not ever provide a theory of truth, and exploring what he was trying to do instead, Prado vacillates between taking the risks that McWhorter describes, the risk of losing the centrality of the knower, and drawing back onto the safe shores of analytic epistemology. Safe on these shores, Prado insists that however compellingly he has described Foucault's reasons for not answering such questions, he really must answer the question of whether or not water expands when it freezes, and he must answer in the affirmative. If only for the alternating passages in which Prado gives himself over to Foucault's texts, and reads them on their own terms, his book is well worth reading. However, for those who want to take the risks that Foucault's texts usher in, the risks McWhorter takes for instance, it can only be frustrating when Prado draws the reader back from the dangers of Foucault's philosophy in order to contemplate once more whether water truly expands when it freezes.