

Review Essay

A New Foucault: The Coming Revisions in Foucault Studies

COLIN KOOPMAN, *University of California at Santa Cruz*

Books Discussed in this Review:

Eric Paras, *Foucault 2.0: Beyond Power and Knowledge*. New York: Other Press, 2006.

Johanna Oksala, *Foucault on Freedom*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005.

David Hoy, *Critical Resistance: From Poststructuralism to Post-Critique*. Cambridge: MIT Press, 2004.

C. G. Prado, *Searle and Foucault on Truth*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006.

Paul Rabinow, *Anthropos Today: Reflections on Modern Equipment*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003.

"This book represents the first broad-based historical study to make full use of Foucault's lecture courses from the Collège de France" (2). This is the bold claim with which Eric Paras begins *Foucault 2.0*. Many today are understandably anxious about the effect that the publication of the course lectures will have on the future of Foucault studies. Paras's book is an important early indicator of what these effects might be.

Paras conjectures that the course lectures will help us better understand the reasons why Foucault's thought underwent the supposedly massive transformations commonly attributed to it. They help explain why Foucault shifted from archaeology to genealogy and then "from being a philosopher of the disappearance of the subject to one wholly preoccupied with the subject" (3). Paras's discussion of this latter shift will be of particular interest to most readers. For this is where he makes the most extensive use of the course lectures, particularly those of 1979 and 1980, "The Birth of Biopolitics" and "The Government of the Living." Paras here describes Foucault's "gradual migration" towards a "neo-liberal, rights-based politics" (11), and he turns to the lectures to show that "[a]utonomy and reflexivity emerged as the characteristics of a subject that could no longer be seen as a mere relay of power" (13). Is Foucault, then, a liberal theorist of human autonomy—just another Kant redux? If only the course lectures had been published twenty years ago we would not have wasted our time puzzling over Foucault's enigmatic models of modern power.

Most readers will find Paras's version of Foucault too much of a concession to critics like Jürgen Habermas and Richard Rorty who insist

that Foucault simply could not account for modern practices of freedom which he himself enjoyed. While Foucault surely came around in his later years to admitting the importance of liberalism and the need for a positive conception of freedom, is it really the case that he went all the way over to a liberal defense of freedom as autonomy? Few readers of Foucault will believe this claim. In order to understand why Paras goes this far, which is well too far, we must consider how he grants priority to the course lectures over Foucault's primary publications.

Paras's book can be divided into two parts. The first two chapters consider interesting intellectual historical questions concerning how the pre-liberal Foucault came to hold the views that he did. Paras is convincing and successful in these chapters. His explanations here rely primarily on two sources: first, he shows that Foucault's thought must be understood in relation to interlocutors such as Sartre and Deleuze; second, he draws on certain of Foucault's minor texts, including the earlier course lectures, to show how Foucault's major work can be more profitably engaged. Proceeding in this way, Paras is able to offer an interesting new explanation of why Foucault shifted from archaeology to genealogy. If this shift is usually explained philosophically ("Foucault had to shift perspectives because the archaeological perspective was philosophically incoherent"), then Paras offers a convincing historical explanation ("Foucault worked with new interlocutors, engaged in new politics, and experimented with new strategies"). Here is Paras at his best:

Foucault's development of genealogy has been treated almost exclusively as an intellectual event—an internal affair of philosophy in which historical conditions were at best ancillary, and at worst irrelevant. Yet Foucault's genealogical turn should be seen neither as the result of methodological failure of archaeology, nor as the result of a sudden interest in Nietzsche. These elements, while present, were not decisive. What *was* decisive was Foucault's concrete situation as a practicing philosopher and social activist in post-1968 France (69).

In the second part of Paras's book, consisting of the final three chapters, the methodology shifts ground. If in earlier chapters Paras is interested in intellectual historical explanations of why and how Foucault's thought shifted from archaeology to genealogy, in later chapters he is primarily interested in interpretations of Foucault's late work on ethics. These are the chapters where Foucault is described as a liberal theorist of autonomous freedom. Paras, to be sure, is still busy in these chapters with intellectual historical explanations of Foucault's striking

change of position. But what he also offers are philosophical explications, largely drawn from the course lectures, intended to show that Foucault's position migrated in the way he describes. This is not the place to evaluate the plausibility of the philosophical arguments Paras attributes to Foucault. Instead, I would like to shift modes and consider Paras's historiographical strategies. I want especially to consider how Paras's new interpretation of Foucault's later work depends on prioritizing the course lectures over the major published works of this period, for this constitutes a major historiographical decision.

The question with which most readers will approach Paras's book concerns this very issue. In what way does Paras make use of the course lectures, and is he successful? Certainly some will wish that Paras had plunged more extensively into the lectures insofar as an exhaustive commentary on their content is not to be found here. Paras bets that "the courses allow us to ask new questions" (3). But what is the status of these new questions? Are they the questions that were most important to Foucault? Or are they merely tangential interests which Foucault sometimes indulged? Undoubtedly, there will be some of both.

Among Foucaultians, it is common to hear the impressive-sounding claim that the translation and publication of the course lectures is going to transform Foucault studies dramatically. Maybe. But we ought to be careful here. It is one thing for this transformation to assume the form of the lectures clarifying certain obscure ideas in Foucault's major works. It is quite another for it to assume the form of a leveling of Foucault's works in which the lectures are treated as equal to the published works. This latter kind of transformation carries with it the risk of effacing Foucault's major works in preference for what critics might refer to as scraps meticulously rescued from Foucault's wastebasket. Whatever the true status of these texts—wastebasket scraps or unpublished genius—you get the idea.

Paras's book is timely in that he employs the course lectures in two ways. In his earlier chapters Paras uses the lectures to explicate the ways in which Foucault's thought underwent the shift from archaeology to genealogy. In the final two chapters Paras shifts strategy and begins to regard the lectures as containing the actual core of Foucault's later thought. This latter strategy fuels Paras's description of Foucault's late ethics as a defense of autonomy in the modern liberal tradition. I have already noted above the philosophical concerns most Foucaultians will have with this revision of Foucault. I want to suggest that these philosophical defects are likely rooted in a historiographical blunder.

Paras leans very heavily on the course lectures in working out his new version of Foucault, his Foucault 2.0. Regardless of how a new Foucault is arrived at, what must first be shown is why we need a new Foucault.

There are at least two ways of approaching this issue. One is to insist that Foucault 1.0 is currently saddled with problems that Foucault 2.0 will resolve, most likely through a dramatic reinterpretation based on the use of the newly available course lectures. Another approach would be to regard the inadequacies of Foucault 1.0 not as internal problems of philosophical coherence but as external problems concerning our deployment of Foucaultian concepts within the critical and academic contexts where they might do more work. This second approach involves bringing Foucault to bear in contexts he himself did not often address and in relation to philosophical traditions he himself did not adequately consider. While this work at its best will occur at the cross-disciplinary interface of philosophy, history, anthropology, sociology, and so on, there is also much specifically philosophical work to be done today in relating Foucault to philosophical traditions which might enrich genealogy, archaeology, and the history of problematizations. While such an approach would clearly focus mostly on Foucault's primary publications, there would be ample room for using the course lectures where they are helpful. For instance, the discussions of nationalist racism and modern historiography in the 1976 "Society Must Be Defended" lectures or the contrasts between epistemology-centered philosophy and practice-directed spirituality from the 1982 "The Hermeneutics of the Subject" lectures.

These two approaches to the question of why we need a new Foucault will yield two different Foucault 2.0s. The first will revise Foucault in the interests of internal coherence and scholarly consistency. The risk here is that Foucault 2.0 will be just as obfuscating to non-Foucaultians as Foucault 1.0 has been. The risk, in other words, is that Foucaultians will soon find themselves talking only to themselves. By contrast, the second approach to this question will revise Foucault in almost the opposite way. Foucault 2.0 will be designed with usability, portability, and connectability specifically in mind.

There is no telling at this early stage which version of Foucault 2.0 will finally prevail. This is a metaphilosophical question depending as much on the shifting self-image of philosophy as on anything else. Paras's book is so useful at this stage because its two parts put on display the two versions of Foucault 2.0 just sketched. I have already indicated what kind of Foucault 2.0 I find more usable. To clarify why I prefer the "connected Foucault 2.0" to the "scholarly Foucault 2.0" I would like to consider four other recent books, all of which try to work up a more widely usable Foucault by carefully connecting aspects of his thought to other philosophical traditions not usually inflected with Foucaultian themes: phenomenology, deconstruction, analytic philosophy, and pragmatism. In each case, the intended result is not so much a

philosophically more correct Foucault as it is a critically more impressive amalgam which brings Foucault together with other important twentieth-century philosophers such as Merleau-Ponty, Derrida, Searle, and Dewey. Not all of these books are successful in this project, but taken together they offer an important new direction for Foucault studies which constitutes a major alternative to the more narrow scholarly direction pursued by Paras.

A major theme of Johanna Oksala's *Foucault on Freedom* is the often mentioned but little explored connection between Foucault and phenomenology. Oksala takes up this important question previously discussed by Béatrice Han, Hubert Dreyfus, and Rudi Visker. Oksala states her goal at the outset: "I will argue that understanding Foucault's background in phenomenology and relating his work to it is important for understanding his philosophical position" (9). This ambiguous statement leaves Oksala plenty of latitude in her attempt to "relate" Foucault to phenomenology: such relations could assume the form of shared interpretations, thematic overlap, or even outright philosophical opposition. These ambiguities pervade Oksala's attempts to connect Foucault's thought to that of Husserl, Merleau-Ponty, and Levinas insofar as the terms of connection are in each case very different. Oksala's claim that phenomenology is important for understanding Foucault's philosophical position, though stated strongly, is defended in a somewhat weaker form. It is uncertain if this means that Foucault's thought can be strongly connected only to Heidegger's hermeneutical variant of phenomenology, as Han and Dreyfus seem to suggest, but it certainly raises that question.

Oksala detects links between Foucault and phenomenology in two places: "a critical inquiry into the conditions of possibility of knowledge" and also "a philosophical study of the subject" (7). The first link is established by connecting Foucault's early work on language to Husserl's phenomenology. The second link is established by describing the relevance of Merleau-Ponty's conception of the lived body for Foucault's middle work on power, and then by claiming Levinas's work on ethical responsibility as crucial for a philosophical defense of Foucault's late work on ethical subjectivity. The connections to Husserl and Levinas seem tenuous at times, so I will consider only Oksala's more interesting argument that Foucault's notion of the body as a site of resistance shares much with Merleau-Ponty's conception of the lived body. For Oksala, the body is developed by Foucault as "a locus of resistance in the sense that it forms the spiral of limits and transgressions" (132). Oksala considers familiar problems in Foucault's account of resistance insofar as it seems difficult for him to account for freedom if the subject is always already defined by the powers constituting it. Oksala thinks Merleau-Ponty can help. Foucault scholars will find her argument rich and

suggestive, but I wonder if Merleau-Ponty scholars will find in it an acceptable interpretation of the concept of the lived body. Oksala finds standard accounts of the Merleau-Pontyan body problematic in their quasi-foundational emphasis on the tacit cogito. She prefers instead to focus on the intersubjectivity made explicit by Merleau-Ponty's account. But is it really possible to erase the tacit cogito from *The Phenomenology of Perception*? Merleau-Ponty did not think so. When he finally came to reject the tacit cogito in his notes for *The Visible and the Invisible* he was explicit that this would require a deep rethinking of his earlier phenomenology.

Oksala's attempt to locate a notion of embodied resistance in Foucault seems to me vitally important. Fortunately, these issues concerning Foucault's conception of freedom have also been recently taken up, albeit in a quite different manner, by David Hoy in his *Critical Resistance*. Hoy's explicit theme is the topic of resistance in recent Continental philosophy. His discussion ranges over a very diverse set: Nietzsche, Deleuze, Foucault, Bordieu, Levinas, Derrida, Laclau, and Žižek. Hoy suggests that his book can be read as an index of the centrality of resistance in recent philosophical discourse, and that it need not be taken as attempting to synthesize these diverse strands into any single account of resistance (237). That is how I prefer to read the book, especially since much of contemporary philosophy in North America has strangely failed to focus on this important topic in European philosophy. Read in this way, this work is tremendously insightful and by itself opens up a whole new domain of questions which ought to be taken more seriously by Continental philosophers in North America. Although Hoy's various accounts of resistance do not stand in need of synthesis or comparison, he nevertheless offers readers a provocative argument in favor of one particular conception of resistance as theorized by what he calls "deconstructive genealogy" (227ff.). It is in terms of this connection between Derrida and Foucault that Hoy's book best fits into the context of the present discussion, so I will set aside his much welcome discussions of Deleuze, Bordieu, and Laclau.

Hoy's subtitle is "from poststructuralism to post-critique." Why, one may ask, would anyone want to move beyond critique? Here is Hoy's answer: "deconstructive genealogy disrupts methodological smugness by calling into question the very grounds of criticism.... Post-critique is thus self-critique all the way down" (229, 228). This move beyond critique was Derrida's, who "thinks and exceeds critique without compromising it" (237). Hoy thinks that Foucaultian concepts stand to gain from taking Derridean post-critique on board. But how? Foucault's project was one of "showing that what is taken as natural or as necessary is really contingent and historical" (238). What is to be gained by adding post-

critique? Was Foucault not already post-critical enough? Was the problem with Foucault not that he was too unwilling to take a stand? How can Derrida, who was even more evasive than Foucault, help him overcome this pragmatic difficulty in his position, the one on which critics like Habermas and Rorty called him out?

Hoy's argument is that adding Derridean deconstructive post-critique to Foucaultian genealogy bridges the gap between the ethical commitment of the former and the political insight of the latter. This argument is obviously enticing because it follows on from Foucault's own recognition in his final two books that the political resistance sought by genealogy needs to be followed up by a practice of ethical resistance. Derrida, Hoy argues, can supply Foucault with this ethics.

This argument must answer three questions. First, is it really the case that Foucault's political philosophy did not already involve an ethics? Hoy helps us see that it did not. Second, can Derrida's ethics fill in the gaps in Foucault's politics? Hoy is persuasive that at least some of the gaps can be bridged by deploying Derridean concepts and strategies. Third, can Derrida's ethics fill these gaps better than can other ethical theories currently available? This is a question on which Hoy does not fully deliver, although it is beyond the scope of his project. Even so, it is not beyond the scope of his arguments on behalf of a deconstructive genealogy. This is therefore a point that Hoy, and any other prospective deconstructive genealogist, would do well to consider.

Concerning this third question, my hunch is that Foucault's politics stands to gain more from ethical theories other than that of deconstruction. Better candidates might include the views elaborated by Stanley Cavell or Martha Nussbaum, who have done much to explain how ethical relationships might exist in the philosophical atmosphere of contingency and uncertainty which Foucault was so interested to impress upon his readers. Another possibility is Bernard Williams who, like Foucault, is skeptical of modern rule-based moral theories. Williams is also a good candidate insofar as he took Nietzsche's question ("why value truth?") at least as seriously as Foucault did (see Williams's *Truth and Truthfulness* [2002]). Williams's answer to this question is very different from Foucault's, but the two already share much in having had the courage to ask this crucial ethical question.

My suggestion that Foucaultian thought might benefit from exploring connections to certain philosophers in the analytic tradition will strike many as strange. Fortunately, a precedent now exists for this suggestion, though in the context of analytic epistemology rather than analytic ethics. C. G. Prado's *Searle and Foucault on Truth* is a fine attempt to connect Foucault to thinkers in traditions with which he is not usually associated. The continuing hostilities between analytic and Continental

philosophy set the stage for Prado. He intends his book as seeking a "*rapprochement* between the two camps" (1). This is advice that unfortunately still falls as deafly on the ears of most Foucault scholars as it does on those of most Searle specialists. Fortunately, in both cases, recent years have seen some settling of the hostilities. Analysts and Continentalists are finally beginning to explore one another's work.

Prado's claims on behalf of cross-canon fertilization promise much, although his book does not fully deliver on the promise. Part of the problem is that Prado considers two thinkers at opposite ends of the philosophical spectrum regardless of their respective standings in our standard canons. Major interpretive concessions have to be granted to develop substantial connections between Searle and Foucault, especially on the issue of truth. The result is that the reader is often left feeling that both Searle and Foucault have implausible accounts of truth and that Davidson, to whom Prado turns again and again, has offered the best that philosophy can give on the subject. The book concludes with the thought that both Searle and Foucault "reject the old philosophical hankering for a *theoretical* story about truth" (171). But it was Davidson and Rorty, not Searle and Foucault, who really made that thought their own.

Prado spends two early chapters detailing the background of Searle's and Foucault's overall philosophical projects. His explications of both theorists are helpful and clear. Prado's next two chapters are devoted to showing that while Foucault and Searle hold different views of truth they nevertheless share a form of realism. Prado's discussion here convincingly shows that much can be gained by placing Foucault's thought in relation to analytic epistemology. Still, however, his goal of describing a realism shared by Foucault and Searle seems not to have been met. Since Searle straightforwardly is a realist, the real interpretive work must be performed on Foucault. Foucault's realism, we are told, consists in his agreeing with Searle that there exist realities outside of those entities marshaled by discursive practice. The discursive certification of sentences as true is one thing, for Foucault, while the existence of extra-discursive realities is quite another. Foucault's concept of discursive truth may detach it from reality, but he is not for that reason an irrealist: "It is the epistemic role of the world that Foucault problematizes, not the world" (119). But I would have thought this is the issue for realists like Searle. I take the realist's point to be that reality can make our sentences true. When thinkers like Foucault and Davidson deny this, they fail to be realists in the crucial epistemological sense even if they remain realists in some lesser ontological or scientific sense. These lesser realisms are of only passing interest to epistemological realists like Searle.

Prado is aware of this difficulty. Perhaps this is why the view he finally attributes to Foucault is extremely cautious: Foucault's theory of truth is described as "not being irrealist" (139). But not being irrealist is different than being realist, for one could always be neither, as for example many pragmatists have been. Prado considers pragmatism on this point: "Foucault is simply silent on the issue of extralinguistic or extradiscursive reality. In this, as we will see, he is of a mind with Rorty" (87). But Rorty has always been decidedly opposed to realisms of the sort defended by Searle. Rorty's point against Searle was not that we ought to be anti-realists, but that the philosophical debate between realism and anti-realism has lost its relevance. That is why Rorty is not bothered when strong realists like Searle complain that he and Davidson are not the right kind of epistemological realist. According to Rorty, once-fashionable epistemological realisms and anti-realisms are now, for better or worse, answers to expired questions. Was this not Foucault's position as well? In other words, was Foucault not more of a pragmatist than a realist?

This thought, though it is mentioned in passing from time to time, has been little explored in the literature on Foucault. Among pragmatists there has been some work (most notably John Stuhr's *Genealogical Pragmatism* [1997] and *Pragmatism, Postmodernism, and the Future of Philosophy* [2003]), but still not a great deal. One recent book by a well known Foucault scholar explores, albeit quite briefly, this promising possibility of a philosophical interchange between Foucaultian genealogy and Deweyan pragmatism.

Paul Rabinow summarizes his intentions in *Anthropos Today* in terms that will strike many as pragmatist in orientation: "this book seeks to bring together a set of conceptual tools and to use them as a starting point to advance an experimental mode for the human sciences in which concepts and techniques could be made to function differently" (3). Rabinow himself turns to deploying this conceptual toolkit in the context of his own research in the "anthropology of the contemporary" (readers looking for a helpful explanation of what this is should see Rabinow's recent coauthored article in *Anthropology Today* 20, no. 5 or visit *Anthropology of the Contemporary Research Collaboratory* online at www.anthropos-lab.net). Yet it remains clear that Rabinow's toolkit is also a philosophical resource in its own right which could be put to work in contexts besides that of an anthropology of ourselves.

Rabinow's book can be divided into two parts. The first part, comprised of the first five chapters, is devoted to explicating a toolkit that blends Foucault and Dewey. The second part of the book—the final two chapters—seeks to apply this toolkit by deploying it in the context of a certain strand of thought on modernity, namely, a tradition of discontent

found in Freud and Weber. Since I find the attempt to bring Dewey and Foucault together a promising one, and since I also find the idea of explicating either one in terms of familiar Weberian and Freudian themes less than promising, I will consider only Rabinow's early chapters connecting genealogy to pragmatism.

Here is the crux of Rabinow's claim for an association between Dewey and Foucault: "Foucault's specification of what he means by problematization sounds unexpectedly quite similar to John Dewey's definition of thinking as problem solving" (48). Rabinow's summary of Dewey is short but tightly focused on important aspects of pragmatism which most scholars of pragmatism would commend. Rabinow focuses on Dewey's description of thinking and experience as temporal processes which mediate between past truths and novel futures (16). He also focuses on the explicitly normative dimensions of this process which he finds most convincingly described by Dewey in terms of control and meaning (17). Situations, for Dewey, come with needs or norms built into them and the process of inquiry functions to fulfill these needs and explicate these norms. This proves a key philosophical bridge insofar as Foucault is devoted to exploring the history of the situated normativity which Dewey understands as a beginning point for meaning and control. In Foucault, Rabinow claims, "the specific diacritic of thought is found ... in the attempt to achieve a modal change from seeing a situation not only as 'a given' but as 'a question'" (18). Foucault's work aimed to explore transformations, both contemporary and historical, in which we come to see situations in new ways such that what formerly appeared as necessary now shows itself as contingent and therefore open to critical intervention.

The obvious gaps that once seemed to separate pragmatism and genealogy become, in the perspective offered by Rabinow, two moments of the same process. Take this claim: "In contrast to Dewey, Foucault stops short, in a rigorously self-limiting manner, of proposing means of rectification. The extent to which Foucault's practice could be assimilated to a reconstruction (in Dewey's sense) is therefore complicated" (18). Complicated, yes, but clearly compelling. One quickly discerns the enormous potentiality of Rabinow's suggestions. Although both Dewey and Foucault cast their work in terms of problems, the difference which always seemed to separate them was that they came at problems from opposite sides: Foucault was interested in how problems are generated while Dewey was interested in how problems are solved. While this may seem at first glance like an irreconcilable philosophical difference, it is apparent that these two activities actually require one another. Problematization prepares the material for problem solving, just as problem solving is the most appropriate response to the work of problematization.

It is in this sense that Rabinow's brief discussion paves the way for further research connecting Foucault to Dewey.

The fact that all of Foucault's major publications have now been thoroughly scrutinized suggests that continued discussion of his work will soon enter a new phase. There are, I have urged, at least two ways of approaching these coming revisions in Foucault studies. According to the first approach we should perpetuate the scholarly digestion of Foucault's thought by submitting the course lectures to the same level of critical analysis that his primary publications received. According to the second approach we should reinterpret Foucault with the aim of deploying his concepts in the many cross-disciplinary and inter-philosophical contexts where they may be increasingly effective. Those who prefer the second approach will suggest to those who adopt the first that one can delay pragmatism for the sake of scholarship for only so long. Wait too long, they will say, and everyone else begins to lose interest. This is an old line of thinking which philosophers ought to consider carefully.

cwkoopman@gmail.com