



Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics by Hubert L. Dreyfus; Paul Rabinow

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MICHEL FOUCAULT: BEYOND STRUCTURALISM AND HERMENEUTICS by Hubert L. Dreyfus and Paul Rabinow, with an afterword by Michel Foucault. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982. Pp. xxiii, 231. \$25.00.

Hubert Dreyfus is best known for his elaboration of a conceptual gulf between human and artificial intelligence, Paul Rabinow for his synthesis of symbolic analysis and historical change (in his study of Morocco). It is perhaps natural that they share an interest in the *oeuvre* of Foucault as the beginnings of a fruitful research program which will show "how our culture attempts to normalize individuals through increasingly rationalized means, . . . [and why] the study of human beings as subjects and objects has such a centrality to our culture." It is a sign of their faithfulness to Foucault's project that for the first part of this review I shall speak as if the authors and Foucault were one, an assumption which with some minor asides seems fully justified by the text.

Their problem — and ours — has its origins, as do all *modern* problems, in a reading of Kant. Kant, especially in his transcendental thought, sought to ground human affairs on themselves alone, and was thereby the founder of the "human science," namely, those sciences according to which human beings live and work according to laws which they can in turn know with potentially complete clarity. For Foucault, Kant made it possible to claim that it was precisely because of the human "enslavement" to "human" laws that human beings were taking the place of God in a universe which, during the nineteenth century, became increasingly conscious of the supposed need to replace the older, dying God.

Foucault calls his Kant criticism the "analytic of finitude" and suggests that it reveals that human beings are beset by a series of "double aspects." Humans appear (1) as objects of study and as the subjects which make that study possible; (2) as ultimately surrounded by that which they know cannot be known, and yet as themselves the source of intelligibility; and (3) as the product of a history of which they are also the source. For Foucault, three currents of thought have emerged out of these human dichotomies: structuralism, which understands human behavior as a series of rule-governed transformations of elements which are in themselves meaningless; phenomenology, in which meaning is the helpless and unhelped gift of an autonomous subject; and hermeneutics, in which social practices acquire their meaning only as the cover over a deeper significance which exists only as revelation.

Dreyfus and Rabinow trace Foucault's accounts of the developments and intertwinings of these strands with considerable clarity and economy and argue that, as his thought first developed, Foucault drew from and "radicalized" all three. In a more or less chronological exegesis of Foucault's work, they give a series of chapters that correspond to the steps of the progressive radicalization of Foucault's understanding.

Foucault's journey has had two major way-stations, as defined by two loosely sequential enterprises or approaches: archaeology and genealogy. Dreyfus and Rabinow argue that the nub of the transition from the former to the latter comes after *les évènements* in France, and is marked by the 1970 Inaugural Lecture to the Collège de France. "Archaeology" had started from the premise that the human sciences were self-regulating and autonomous realms of discourse and that the claims that they made about the world could thus be treated as "discourse-objects," without raising the question if any element were in some sense "better" or closer to "the truth." For the archaeologist, although regularities did not present themselves, as in Kant, as the "conditions of the *possibility*" of ensembles of discursive practices (for example, insane asylums, leper colonies), they were, "however, presented as the *conditions of occurrence* of statements, so that once the archaeologist is in possession of the rules describing a discursive formation he can see that those types of speech acts which were actually uttered . . . were the only ones that could have been seriously entertained at that time." (pp. 92-3). Dreyfus and Rabinow argue, as Foucault himself had already intimated in 1968, that this project must founder since (1) it lacked both a convincing theory of the power of the rules which regulate the understanding, and (2) must perforce remain silent about social institutions.

Crudely, the archaeologist was too detached, unable to account for his or her own historicity, too metaphysical. The remedy was found in "genealogy." More or less following Nietzsche, Foucault defines genealogy in a 1971 essay:

If history is a series of violent and surreptitious appropriations of a system of rules, which in itself has no essential meaning, in order to impose a direction, to bend it to a new will, to force its participation in a different game, and to subject it to secondary rules, then the development of humanity is a series of interpretations.

Genealogy is the history of these interpretations, which are not, however, interpretations of *something*; there is no deeper reality than what appears.

For the genealogist, everything human is in motion. Dreyfus and Rabinow:

All of our ideals of truth and beauty, our bodies, our instincts, our feelings might seem to be beyond relativity. (Foucault) seeks to dissolve this comforting illusion of identity and firmness and solidity. There are no constants for the genealogist [p. 110].

Note that neither the instincts (Freud?) nor the body (Merleau-Ponty: *le corps propre*) suffice.

Once he relinquishes the primacy of archaeology and accepts that there is no foundation effective or solid enough for our being, Foucault's enterprise turns in three related directions. He pursues effective historical accounts of "explicit programs" such as Bentham's *Panopticon*, which function as "actual programs of action and reform." He investigates the "biopolitical technologies" which result; that is, the technologies of discipline which "produce a human being who could be treated as a 'docile body'" (as in workshops, hospitals, prisons). Last, he develops an analytics of power as "a general matrix of force relations at a given time, in a given society" (p. 186). For Foucault, the study of power might be thought of as the investigation of what we do in a particular society at a particular time.

For Dreyfus and Rabinow, two general conclusions presently attach themselves to this project. They read—correctly, I believe—into Foucault's work a position something like that which attaches itself to Weber, Wittgenstein, Adorno, the later Heidegger, Kuhn, and Searle. Lest such a collection take away the breath, they convincingly argue that all of these thinkers share the position that meaningful and important problems in any area of human activity are at root identified by reference to particular (historical) exemplars of accomplishment. Foucault's investigation of carceral practices, for instance, is akin to a Kuhnian investigation of the "normal science" which followed, for instance, the publication of Newton's *Opticks*.

Second, they suggest that Foucault argues and deplores that contemporary technologies of "bio-power"—power over the body—tend to recast political problems as technical ones. "The problem bio-power has succeeded in establishing is how to make the welfare institutions work; it does not ask, What do they mean? or as Foucault would put it, What do they do? (p. 196).

In this book, Dreyfus and Rabinow present the most clear and comprehensive treatment of Foucault yet available in English, or any other

language, as far as I know. In general, the book is clearer than, though never as playful as, its subject; it could have used a good copyeditor, not only for the more than needed number of repetitions, identical citations, but also for occasional split infinitives and garbled sentences. They offer no real criticisms (except for an occasional slap at Foucault's Gallocentrism), but in their conclusion do make a number of interesting suggestions for directions in which to extend Foucault's analysis.

It is fair to say, as do Dreyfus and Rabinow, that Foucault's work is still "in progress." One does sense occasionally that in their enthusiasm for the research program that has already taken us "beyond structuralism and hermeneutics," a bit more of circumspection was possible. If we follow Foucault, where are we? What should we think about it? A number of things suggest themselves. First, in his reminder that, even in our thinking, we are historical beings, Foucault is trying to recover for us that notion that philosophy has to do with how actual human beings live their lives. Dreyfus and Rabinow are certainly correct to remind us of the resemblance between the thought of Foucault and the kind of "ordinary language philosophy" associated with Searle (and others, who go unnamed), but more stress on this aspect would have shown us what was at stake. Second, one wishes that they had given some more thought to the significance of attempts, such as Foucault's, to domesticate Marxism into a "broader" thought about the world. They accept uncritically Foucault's assumption that there is an irreconcilable conflict between Marx and Nietzsche, and that Nietzsche wins.

Third, it often seems that Foucault is insufficiently apprehensive about the destructive imperatives available in Nietzsche's (and his own) thought. Although Foucault himself does not talk like this, there is in his writings a potential for what Hegel called *die Furie des Verschwindens*: He forgets that both Freud and Weber thought the malaise and even the sufferings of civilization a bearable price for the journey. Finally, one wonders if the relatively unoriginal understanding of contemporary politics which Foucault attaches to the concept of "bio-power" might not have its origins in the way that he tames Marxism. After all, Sheldon Wolin told us twenty years ago that the West tended to want to recast political problems as technical ones. And, to the best of my knowledge, he did not need to go "beyond meta-phenomenology" to do it.

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