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Foucault on Freedom. Johanna Oksala. *Modern European Philosophy*, ed. Robert B. Pippin. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005. Pp. xiii + 223. \$88.00 h.c. 0-521-84779-6.

Johanna Oksala has an ambitious project in this text, covering much more than Foucault's views on freedom. She also focuses on the relationship of his work to phenomenological theory, arguing that though he distanced himself from phenomenology, many of his concerns and methods stemmed directly from his engagement with and criticisms of it. Further, Oksala discusses Foucault's views of subjectivity and agency, and explains (in response to criticisms by feminists and others) how his view of the subject as a product of power relations is compatible with his promotion of resistance and practices of freedom. Finally, Oksala addresses the differences as well as the links between three main areas of Foucault's work: archaeology, genealogy, and ethics. The title, therefore, does not do justice to the scope of the text. Though this breadth means that the focus on freedom is at times obscured, on the whole Oksala provides a clear and largely well-supported argument for the various ways in which Foucault discusses and uses the concept of freedom, with several original and promising new readings of parts of his work.

In a brief introduction, Oksala presents the multiple theses of the text and shows how they are meant to fit into her overall argument on Foucault's treatment of freedom. The text is then divided into three parts, entitled "Language," "Body," and "Ethics," in each of which Oksala: (1) outlines the basic method and important arguments of one of three areas of Foucault's work (archaeology, genealogy, ethics, respectively); (2) explains the main locus of

freedom in each area (language, the body, ethics); (3) explains how Foucault's views in this area are related to phenomenology, focusing on a different phenomenological theorist in each section (Husserl, Merleau-Ponty, and Levinas).

Oksala argues that there are three main meanings of freedom in Foucault's work. First, there is freedom as "ontological contingency" (189). In Parts I and II, Oksala shows how for Foucault, both language (in his archaeological work) and the body (in his genealogical work) are sites of indeterminacy and contingency that allow for transgression of limits, opportunities to "see things differently and expand the domain of what can be thought and imagined" (84). For Foucault, though language can be constraining when it upholds the particular mode of order in an historical period (the *episteme* as "the historical *a priori* of an epoch" (22)), it also "demarcates a domain of freedom in the mode of literature" (81). Avant-garde, literary writing can "show the instability of the order of things that we take for granted," and thus the potential for transformation (84). According to Oksala, Foucault also theorizes the possibility of resistance and transgression through the body, in his genealogical texts on disciplinary and normalizing power. Though for Foucault power relations serve as "the condition of possibility for the subject" (94) in that they form "the grid of intelligibility for its actions, intentions, desires and motivations" (95), the subject still has the capacity for resistance through experiences and pleasures of the body. Oksala argues that these can transgress limits of discursive intelligibility and thereby contest "discursive definitions, values and normative practices" (132). She notes, however, that Foucault does not provide many details on how this is possible, and she suggests an "uneasy alliance between Foucault and Merleau-Ponty" in order to fill in the gaps: "phenomenological insights concerning the lived body could enrich Foucault's idea of the body

as a locus of resistance” (134). In so doing, Oksala responds to feminist criticisms of both Foucault’s and Merleau-Ponty’s views of the body and its capacities for engendering freedom.

Foucault also speaks of freedom in a second way as a practice, something deliberately undertaken by subjects through critical reflection on their own beliefs and actions, and the power relations that make them possible. This process of reflection can lead to new ways of thinking, being, and acting, in which a subject “materializes the possibilities that are opened around it” through this reflection and through the ontological contingency of language and the body (190). This form of freedom is most evident in Foucault’s late work on ethics as care of the self, where he focuses on subjects’ own power to form and reform themselves. Oksala points out that it is difficult to find in Foucault’s work resources for subjects to create themselves in new ways by simply reflecting on how they have been subject to power, and she suggests that Levinas could supply what is missing from Foucault in this regard. In his discussion of the radical alterity of the other, Levinas allows not only for ethics to involve the self and other (whereas Foucault emphasizes only the relation to the self), but also a source of otherness that the subject can draw on in order to find new possibilities for being and thus to practice its freedom.

Finally, Foucault treats freedom as an ethos, an ideal that informs and motivates his own work and the practices of freedom that he encourages on the part of others. Discussing Foucault’s self-professed alignment with Kant in some of his late texts and lectures, Oksala argues that “by linking his thought to the Enlightenment, Foucault makes the normative move of adopting the ideals associated with it—critical reason and practical autonomy—as the implicit ground on which his critiques of domination, abusive forms of power and reason rest” (187). Unlike Kant, however, he treats these as historically contingent rather than universal values, ones that make sense from a position in the historical present in which Foucault and his audience are

located. Freedom in this sense might be thought to explain why we would take up freedom as a practice and engage the possibilities opened up by freedom as ontological contingency.

I find Oksala's argument for these three meanings of freedom in Foucault's work clear, convincing, and a helpful way to think through some of the ways in which archaeology, genealogy and ethics are linked. My main concern with the text is its breadth of topics, as noted at the beginning of this review. It was difficult at times to follow how the many points the author covers hold together around the main focus on freedom. This was mitigated, however, by the helpful cues Oksala provides within the text to guide the reader through the argument, and the clear roadmap in the introduction to which I found myself returning on multiple occasions. After reflecting on the argument as a whole I found that it does cohere well, though this wasn't always clear while reading. Further, while I thought the focus on phenomenology initially puzzling since it seems to distract at times from the discussion of freedom, it is necessary given that the author uses the work of two phenomenologists to supplement gaps in Foucault's views. In order for this strategy to make sense, Oksala must argue that Foucault does not reject phenomenology as thoroughly as some commentators have claimed. Still, I believe more could be said to show how and why taking some aspects of Merleau-Ponty's and Levinas' views to add to those of Foucault would work, given the different concerns and methods of these thinkers. Finally, the multiple threads of Oksala's argument leaves little space to discuss some of their complex and controversial aspects, including how the autonomous agency needed to practice freedom is possible in the Foucauldian subject as produced by power, and how Foucault both uses and criticizes Enlightenment values like autonomy itself. Oksala provides intriguing but short arguments on these and other controversial points in Foucault's views, and I would have liked to have seen more extended discussions to fill out what is otherwise a strong and original work.

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