FOUCAULT STUDIES

© Martin Saar & Frieder Vogelmann
ISSN: 1832-5203
DOI: https://doi.org/10.22439/fs.i36.7231
Foucault Studies, No. 36, 31-54, September 2024

Article reuse guidelines:
https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/

ARTICLE

Thinking and Unthinking the Present: Philosophy after Foucault

MARTIN SAAR & FRIEDER VOGELMANN
Goethe University Frankfurt, Germany & University of Freiburg, Germany

ABSTRACT. What might a contemporary philosophical practice after and following Foucault look like? After briefly analyzing Foucault's rather ambiguous stance towards academic philosophy in his posthumously published *Le discours philosophique*, we argue for continuing his historico-philosophical practice of diagnosing the present. This means taking up his analytic heuristic (with its three dimensions of power, knowledge and subjectivity) rather than his more concrete diagnostic concepts and the specific historical results they yield. We argue that the common methodological operation on each of the three axis is to shift the perspective from the given legitimacies, norms, identities and selves to their historical, conflict-ridden emergence. Practicing philosophy in this way allows developing Foucauldian contributions in two contemporary philosophical debates: critical ontology and political epistemology. While ontology and epistemology might seem surprising fields to work in for philosophers inspired by and critically loyal to Foucault, we attempt to dispel these reservations and illustrate the stakes in both debates, pointing to the urgent issues of ecological questions and of the problematization of untruths in politics respectively.

Keywords: (political) epistemology, knowledge, meta-philosophy, (critical) ontology, politics of truth, power, subjectivity

INTRODUCTION

It is unclear whether Michel Foucault himself cared about being called a philosopher or about being read by philosophers; his time was, after all, an epoch in which the "end of philosophy" was called out more than once. It is evident, however, that speaking in disciplinary and academic terms, Foucault invented and even more so inspired a whole range of projects in the humanities and social sciences that have openly left behind the traditional forms and methodologies of philosophy. In our contribution to assessing the

legacy of his work, we want to ask what a contemporary philosophical practice after and following Foucault might look like and what could distinguish it from other receptions.

We will first consider the recently edited manuscript on "the philosophical discourse" from 1966 to bring out Foucault's own early, rather undecided stance towards philosophy as a discourse and tradition at the time. We will then outline a methodological continuation of Foucault's historical-philosophical practice and discuss two strong candidates within current philosophical discussions that invite a specific Foucauldian elaboration, namely, the debates on a critical and historical ontology on the one hand, and on a new critical and political epistemology on the other. We sketch the rather diverging stakes for both cases and gesture towards the two contemporary material themes whose analysis might be supported by such perspectives and that were far from Foucault's own themes, i.e., a critical ecology and a contribution to the study of untruth in politics, respectively. In doing so, we intend to acknowledge different possible ways of doing philosophy after Foucault and remaining faithful to Foucault, but we insist on the self-critical relation to contemporaneity of any such attempt.

PHILOSOPHY AS DISCOURSE

In the post-war French academic culture and environment in which the young Foucault was growing up, philosophy as a discipline and way of thinking was a surprisingly plural referent. Of course, Foucault grew up reading and interpreting the classical texts and authors. He is said to have considered Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*, the object of his master's thesis, to be the quintessential work of philosophy and asserted that even "that which permits us to think against Hegel" might be something that "remains Hegelian".[1] A thorough knowledge in the history of philosophy from the ancients to the 19th century on the one hand, and a keen interest in the philosophical debates of the moment on the other hand are well-documented, ranging from the aftermath of existentialism, the influence of Husserl and Heidegger on French philosophy, the inclusion of Nietzsche, Kierkegaard and Freud as decisive voices in the emergence of modern philosophy to the debate among Marxists about how to overcome idealist and bourgeois thinking.

But philosophy was also always seen as one strand of academic or scientific activity among and in the context of others, be it the natural sciences and their epistemic history, anthropology and the empirical knowledge of other cultures, or concerns in psychology, psychiatry, psychoanalysis or literature (in the broadest sense). Being trained as a philosopher and a psychologist, but also participating in or reflecting on general scientific, political and cultural tendencies, provided Foucault with a variety of options for how to practice philosophy. His first teaching jobs in psychology, and his interest in the history of the medical sciences and their intersection with psychiatry and psychology that led to

[1] Michel Foucault, "The Discourse on Language" [1969/70], in *The Archaeology of Knowledge and The Discourse on Language* (2010), 235; *La constitution d'un transcendantal historique dans la Phénoménologie de l'esprit de Hegel: Mémoire du diplôme d'études supérieures de philosophie* (2024); see Didier Eribon, *Michel Foucault* (1991), ch. 2.

his first academic publications, moved him away from the very classical choices of a traditional philosophical career.

However, even the first sympathetic readers of Foucault's dissertation on madness and unreason, such as Canguilhem and Althusser, had no doubt that this was a philosophical event of the first rank.[2] The objections that *The Order of Things* provoked and which helped make the book instantly famous were undeniably philosophical attacks on a new and presumably dangerous philosophy, although the main bulk of the book treats authors and texts far removed from the traditional zones of academic philosophy.[3] Classical philosophical authors and texts appear but are not treated systematically in the main publications of the early stages of Foucault's *œuvre*. The recent publication of the lecture notes and manuscripts from that time changes the picture only slightly.

The 'early' Foucault, therefore, is definitely a practitioner of some sort of philosophy but not a commentator of *how* or in which way he is, and he is definitely not a critic of other philosophers in the strict sense. Given this fact, it is easy to understand why the virtually completed but abandoned manuscript on the "philosophical discourse" from the summer of 1966, which was waiting in the archive to be found, has attracted so much attention. The theme and title could rightfully raise the expectation that one could here find and read 'Foucault's philosophy', a topos that was frequently used in the first press reaction to the book.[4] However, on this point, the text disappoints.

Foucault's tentative analysis of the "philosophical discourse" follows the theoretical and methodological premises he had developed in the years before and that had led to the magisterial *The Order of Things*. The project of an 'archaeology of the human sciences' was meant to counter the traditional and authoritative versions of intellectual history or *Geistesgeschichte* in that it treated the thinking of an epoch not as the expression of a deeper meaning or cognitive learning process but as a series of discursive events to be accounted for in formal terms, i.e., in terms of the very rules and parameters constitutive of this very discourse. One of the polemical stakes of this book is that it illustrates the intellectual profile of entire epochs without even referencing the dominant philosophical systems of the time. When Foucault was analyzing the thinking of the Renaissance, the "classical" and the "modern age, this did correspond roughly to the traditional epochalizations—but not quite. And what he took to be the internal grammar of the thinking or domains of knowledge of these times is not explained with reference to any overarching philosophical concepts but rather to formal criteria, ordering the very objects to know in respective scientific fields.

---

[2] See the documents in François Bert, ed., *Histoire de la folie à l'âge classique de Michel Foucault: Regards critiques 1961-2011* (2011).

[3] See the documents in Philippe Artières and Jean-François Bert, eds., *Les mots et les choses de Michel Foucault: Regards critiques 1966-1968* (2009); Stuart Elden, *The Archaeology of Foucault* (2023), 81-91.

[4] See David Zerbib, "Unpublished works shed new light on Michel Foucault: Several experts explain how the treasures found in the philosopher's archives at the National Library of France elucidate Foucault's 'definition of philosophy,'," *Le Monde online* (English), May 11, 2023, https://www.lemonde.fr/en/opinion/article/2023/05/11/unpublished-works-shed-new-light-on-michel-foucault_6026351_23.html

"Similitude", "representation", and "man" are therefore not mainly concepts but classificatory operators, and philosophy is not the one main locus where they are generated and then applied to empirical fields but just one more field in which these operators work. Accordingly, when the "counter-sciences" of psychoanalysis and ethnology (or anthropology) are invoked in the famous final chapter,[5] they clearly somehow represent non-standard forms of theoretical thinking that relate to the dominant philosophies at the time but should not be counted as such in the strict sense themselves. Rather, they constitute promising instances of a future form of theoretical inquiry no longer bound to the formal and logical constraints of the humanistic doctrines that lie at the heart of the Western philosophical tradition, from Kant to Husserl, as it were.

Le discours philosophique, written partly under the impression of the first reactions to *The Order of Things*, compensates this absence that appeared as a strategic or polemic choice in the former book. It is a work almost entirely on philosophy and its history. Yet again, philosophy has no future and no freedom but appears as the expression of certain formal necessities. Philosophy after Nietzsche, Foucault declares on the opening pages of the manuscript, has gained its identity as an "enterprise of diagnosis", and its interpretations amount to attempts to intervene into the present by understanding and grasping it.[6] The philosopher is a sign-reader attempting to "recognize the today that is his own".[7] This relation to one's own time, situation and culture—we might say: this reflexivity—marks philosophy from the beginning and gives it a practical function that exceeds the merely theoretical and ties it essentially to the "today".[8]

However, interestingly, Foucault in this text neither emphasizes nor affirms this contextuality and situatedness of philosophy, and he does not bring it close to a notion of critique or critical activity, as he will do in later texts and even in the very last lectures at the Collège de France that return to the question of philosophy.[9] Here, in 1966, philosophy's boundedness to the today and place and context of the philosopher is fate, not promise. Western culture, the historical argument roughly goes, has "in the first half of the 17th century",[10] i.e., in the age of Francis Bacon, Galileo Galilei and Miguel de Cervantes, invented and differentiated cultural forms or discourses that have centered themselves around a specific form of textuality and a certain discursive logic that have led to stable cultural institutions. Out of a more undifferentiated unity between ethics, wisdom and the arts, the much more sharply differentiated unities of philosophy, science and literature have emerged as the very sites for philosophical, scientific and literary discourse,

[5] Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* [1966] (1970), ch. 10.V, 407-420.
[6] Michel Foucault, *Le discours philosophique* (2023), 14, our transl.; see Martin Saar, "After the Endgames: What was and what is Philosophy?," *Philosophy, Politics and Critique* 1:1 (2024).
[7] Foucault, *Le discours philosophique*, 17.
[8] *Le discours philosophique*, ch. 2, 21-28.
[9] Martin Saar, *Genealogie als Kritik. Geschichte und Theorie des Subjekts nach Nietzsche und Foucault* (2007), 275-286; Frieder Vogelmann, "Foucaults parrhesia – Philosophie als Politik der Wahrheit," in *Parrhesia. Foucaults letzte Vorlesungen – philosophisch, philologisch, politisch*, eds. Petra Gehring and Andreas Gelhard (2012).
[10] *Le discours philosophique*, 75.

respectively. All of them constitute fields of experience and knowledge, but of different forms and internal logics, realized in specific texts and genres. Philosophy ever after, and to illustrate this is Foucault's main goal in *Le discours philosophique*, remains tied to this constellation and this need to draw its boundaries towards and against the other two discourses, as they all need to seal themselves off against the prior authoritative discourse, theology.

Philosophy's creative operation in this era consists (unsurprisingly) in inventing one instance grounding and securing knowledge, namely, the *cogito* or subject.[11] And philosophy remains tied to an ever changing explication and elaboration of what it means to be a subject and to know—from Descartes to Kant to Hegel to Husserl and until the very end of modern philosophy proper—that Foucault claims to see ending or running aground at exactly this time, in the mid-1960s. This gives rise to a stream of different philosophical systems and finally to anti-systematic philosophies, but they all remain within the confines of the early modern inauguration of philosophy: "All philosophies after Descartes obey the legality of this discourse."[12]

The more detailed and complicated analysis Foucault gives in the main bulk of his manuscript is not of interest in this context. Let us just note that he turns his attention mainly towards methodological issues near the end. His treatment of the historical emergence and subsequent development of the modern "philosophical discourse" does not follow the interest of traditional intellectual history nor of systematic reflection on past conceptual options and achievements. Rather, a sort of "functional description [description fonctionelle]" is meant to trace this history on a meta-level.[13] In the last three chapters, the terms "archive" and "archaeology", introduced but not fully elaborated on in *The Order of Things*, are central, and they refer to this methodological or meta-theoretical level on which what can be thought and experienced is accounted for in terms of the very discourse in which it is made to appear. This makes "discursivity the general form of what can be given to and in experience [la forme générale de ce qui peut être donné à l'experience]".[14] The work presented and announced in *Archaeology of Knowledge* in 1969, we might contend, might be considered the methodological program following from such premises, and some of the material studies from around these years might be considered their realization—before the genealogical re-orientation in the 1970s again changes the methodological picture immensely.[15]

---

[11] *Le discours philosophique*, 87.

[12] *Le discours philosophique*, 109.

[13] *Le discours philosophique*, 147. In their commentaries to these passages, the editors helpfully relate this program to Foucault's engagement with the works of Martial Guéroult and Jules Vuillemin, eminent philosophers and commentators of classical works in Foucault's youth, both of whom also attacked the traditional history of ideas, see *Le discours philosophique*, 167.

[14] *Le discours philosophique*, 247.

[15] For our own takes on this issue, see Martin Saar, "Understanding Genealogy: History, Power, and the Self," *Journal for the Philosophy of History* 2:2 (2008); Frieder Vogelmann, *Foucault lesen* (2016).

Yet, the reflection on philosophy, as an object of study in 1966, provided Foucault with one important case in point to develop this program, and philosophy itself became a strange and unfamiliar object under this lens: not a history of more or less successful attempts to reveal the truth but a series of discursive events that can be traced back to the inner logic of a specific discourse trapped in its own self-referentiality. This 'formalist' and historicist approach, as we might call it, characterizes the early Foucault's relation to the very discipline he was inhabiting partly as an outsider—as someone also teaching psychology and engaging in the history of science. Yet, he also acted partly as an insider—as someone translating some proto-structuralist and epistemological insights from Dumézil, Bachelard and Canguilhem into historical-philosophical practice. In the years 1966-1969, Foucault meditates on the beginning and on the end of philosophy (as we know it), and he was inventing the tools not to continue or save it but to analyze it and turn it into an object of study in a perspective that is not in itself philosophical in the traditional sense but something else.

PHILOSOPHY AFTER AND FOLLOWING FOUCAULT

However one judges Foucault's ambivalent relation to philosophy, which is on full display in *Le discours philosophique*, philosophy after Foucault is different, and any philosophy interested in its present will bear his mark. In the following, we argue that one of the most crucial points of his legacy is of a methodological nature: it implies understanding philosophy as a "politics of truth".[16] Such a politics intervenes into currents issues and struggles via a transformative diagnosis of the present. This mobilizes an idea that, as we have seen in the previous section, the early Foucault associated with modern philosophy as such. Using it to imagine a current and future philosophy might open up two important possible ways of philosophizing with and after Foucault.

It is commonplace to recognize that Foucault after the late 1960s frequently described his own work as diagnosing the present, sometimes with reference to Nietzsche, as we saw above, and sometimes with reference to Kant.[17] Yet, how do we build on this idea? While it is tempting to use Foucault's own concepts to come to terms with our present—

[16] Michel Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population: Lectures at the College de France 1977–1978* [2004] (2007), 3. It is worth giving the full quote: "But what I am doing […] is not history, sociology, or economics. […] what I am doing is something that concerns philosophy, that is to say, the politics of truth, for I do not see many other definitions of the word 'philosophy' apart from this."

[17] For Nietzsche, see already Michel Foucault, "Who are you, Professor Foucault?" [1967], in *Religion and Culture*, ed. Jeremy R. Carrette (1999), 91; for Kant, see Michel Foucault, "Structuralism and Post-Structuralism" [1983], in *Essential Works of Michel Foucault 1954–1984. Vol. 2: Aesthetics, Method, and Epistemology*, ed. James Faubion (1998), 449 f.; Michel Foucault, "What is Enlightenment?" [1984], in *Essential Works of Michel Foucault 1954–1984. Vol. 1: Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth*, ed. Paul Rabinow (1997), 303–305, 309, and for discussion, see Sophie Fuggle, Yari Lanci, and Martina Tazzioli, eds., *Foucault and the History of Our Present* (2015).

the panopticon, biopower, governmentality or *parrhesia* come to mind[18]—we think the broader question of how to philosophize after and following Foucault demands a different approach. Not least because of Foucault's conceptual promiscuity, we should be very careful to start from his own diagnostic descriptions.[19] Any philosophy that is able to think our present (instead of his) must proceed differently in order to think in and against the world as it is today.[20] If Foucault's way of doing philosophy is still useful for us, it is not because of any specific concept that elucidates our present but because we can learn from his method of building relevant concepts. This requires us to sketch our understanding of his way of practicing the form of non-standard, historico-conceptual inquiry he himself chose from the early 1970s on, both in his lectures and in the condensed, carefully constructed monographs.

Generally speaking, Foucault uses different methodological concepts, such as discourse, dispositif or problematization, at different times to analyze social practices in a manner that frees us from our usual normative, conceptual and historical assessments and assumptions.[21] Let us briefly indicate how this works on the three axes of his analyses: power, knowledge and subjectivity.

In his analysis of power, Foucault carefully articulates a methodological concept of power as relational, strategic and productive to circumvent questions of legitimacy in favor of questions about functioning.[22] He thereby tries to free us from a "juridico-discursive"[23] understanding of power that reduces all exercises of power to the same—legal—model of prohibition. Attending to the historical development of this impoverished conception of power, Foucault demonstrates that it perpetuates a style of political analysis that is still bound to monarchy and the phantasm of the one centralized site of power. Hence his famous verdict that in "political thought and analysis, we still have not cut off the head of the king".[24] Yet, the argument extends further: we must also rid ourselves of the tendency to interpret power relations by presupposing alleged universals such as the state, civil society or the distinction between politics and economics.[25] This reinforces the

[18] See respectively David Lyons, ed., *Theorizing Surveillance: The Panopticon and Beyond* (2006); Vernon W. Cisney and Nicolae Morar, eds., *Biopower: Foucault and Beyond* (2015); Ulrich Bröckling, Susanne Krasmann, and Thomas Lemke, eds., *Governmentality: Current Issues and Future Challenges* (2010); Petra Gehring and Andreas Gelhard, eds., *Parrhesia. Foucaults letzte Vorlesungen – philosophisch, philologisch, politisch* (2012).

[19] See Verena Erlenbusch-Anderson, "Philosophical Practice Following Foucault," *Foucault Studies* 25 (2018). In her terminology, we side with "methodologism", although for slightly different reasons than those debated between "contextualism" and "appropriationism".

[20] Martin Saar, "Philosophie in ihrer (und gegen ihre) Zeit," *Deutsche Zeitschrift für Philosophie* 67:1 (2019); Frieder Vogelmann, "Der Weisheit Freund und aller Welt Feind? Philosophie mit, in und gegen die Welt," *Deutsche Zeitschrift für Philosophie* 71:2 (2023).

[21] See Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge and The Discourse on Language* [1969] (2010); Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality. Volume I: An Introduction* [1976] (1978); Michel Foucault, *The Use of Pleasure. Volume 2 of the History of Sexuality* [1984] (1990).

[22] See Saar, *Genealogie als Kritik*, 204–224.

[23] Foucault, *The History of Sexuality I*, 82.

[24] *The History of Sexuality I*, 88 f.

[25] See Michel Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics: Lectures at the Collège de France 1978–1979* [2004] (2008), 3.

point we made earlier: If we follow Foucault in diagnosing power relations from their minute and cruel everyday exercise in all their strategic complexity, surprising productivity and historical malleability, then we cannot begin to philosophize by taking up the concrete and specific diagnoses of *his* present half a century ago.

Similarly, Foucault's analyses of knowledge—from scientific discourses such as psychiatry or criminology to individual practices of veridiction such as *parrhesisa*—circumvent the immediate assessment of statements as true or false. Instead, he shifts the focus to the socio-material conditions for statements to be truth-apt, i.e., to have truth-values at all. In the center lies what we can call, using Foucault's own favorite formulations, the *conditions of alethic existence* (instead of epistemic conditions of possibility).[26] This methodological shift is important for Foucault, as he insists that it gives his critique its specific form. Instead of showing certain fields of knowledge to be erroneous (wrong/false), illusionary or ideological, he aims to uncover the set of social practices and the particular conditions of alethic existence established by them and that enabled these forms of knowledge to exist in the first place. As he explains at length in *The Birth of Biopolitics*, this is a constant methodological premise underlying his work:

> The question here [concerning the dichotomy of politics and economy; MS & FV] is the same as the question I addressed with regard to madness, disease, delinquency, and sexuality. In all of these cases, it was not a question of showing how these objects were for a long time hidden before finally being discovered, nor of showing how all these objects are only wicked illusions or ideological products to be dispelled in the light of reason finally having reached its zenith. It was a matter of showing by what conjunctions a whole set of practices—from the moment they become coordinated with a regime of truth—was able to make what does not exist (madness, disease, delinquency, sexuality, etcetera), nonetheless become something, something however that continues not to exist. That is to say, what I would like to show is not how an error […] or how an illusion could be born, but how a particular regime of truth […] makes something that does not exist able to become something. It is not an illusion since it is precisely a set of practices, real practices, which established it and thus imperiously marks it out in reality.[27]

These sets of practices did not come about peacefully. Uncovering the conditions of alethic existence for a specific field of knowledge demonstrates the power struggles and epistemic and social conflicts implied in the establishment of that knowledge. Thus, Foucault's

[26] This formulation of course evokes the difficult question of whether such a program still follows a transcendental form of reflection or rather breaks with it. The question also touches on Foucault's relation to Kant and Husserl, respectively. These issues have been treated extensively in the pages of this journal. Let us just refer to the fundamental contribution by Beatrice Han-Pile, *Foucault's Critical Project: Between the Transcendental and the Historical* (2002) and the contrasting view articulated by Garry Gutting, "Review of Beatrice Han: Foucault's Critical Projekt," *Notre Dame Philosophical Reviews*, https://ndpr.nd.edu/reviews/foucault-s-critical-project/ (accessed February 16, 2024); see also Gary Gutting, *Thinking the Impossible. French Philosophy since 1960* (2011), 145–147.

[27] Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics*, 19, see also 35 f.

critique works by vividly showing us which conflicts had to be fought and won and whose submission needed to be ensured before we got the serene and stable knowledge(s) so familiar to us. He already pointed out this constant methodological operation in his first lecture series at the Collège de France in 1970:

> Then […] we will have put the game of truth back in the network of constraints and dominations. Truth, I should say rather, the system of truth and falsity, will have revealed the face it turned away from us for so long and which is that of its violence.[28]

When it comes to the third axis of analysis, subjectivity, we encounter the same method: Foucault replaces substantial notions of subjectivity—e.g., of individuals being imbued with an interiority that requires guidance and demands to be expressed truthfully—with a methodological, even praxeological concept of the subject as the site of a practical relation to self. Instead of assessing subjectivity in terms of authenticity or autonomy, he proposes a hermeneutical grid of four elements to better analyze the different forms such a practical relation to self can take: what part of the self is worked on (ontology), why (deontology), how (ascetics) and to what end (teleology).[29] Foucault introduces this analytic grid in *The Use of Pleasure* specifically for his history of sexuality in order to get an analytic handle on moral conduct and ethical self-understanding related to sexual acts in late antiquity. Yet, it can be used fruitfully for processes of subjectivation in general, as a remarkable number of studies have shown.[30] Once again, our point is that philosophizing after Foucault should not start from any of the concrete historical forms of subjectivity he diagnosed (e.g., the Greek care of the self; or the objectified, self-reflective ego the modern human sciences have invented). We should rather take inspiration from the methodological shift that circumvents foundational or substantive concepts of subjectivity in order to show, for example, how and why we are so obsessed with becoming authentic or autonomous subjects in the first place.

Talking about the "politics of truth" behind and below the specific truths or specific legitimacies, norms, identities and selves that there are refers to a rather abstract common denominator of much of Foucault's work. Yet, it indicates why Foucault himself suspected that philosophy as a discipline and discourse is unable to take this perspective: Philosophy (as we know it) is too much in awe before and in love with truth to look behind and beneath it. It tends to take given truths, legitimacies, norms, identities and selves as the legitimate objects of thinking and as the practical realities to cope with. The shift in perspective away from the many truths to the politics of truth is critical, even destructive of this immersion in and complicity with the given realities. It does not deny their relevance,

[28] Michel Foucault, *Lectures on the Will to Know: Lectures at the College de France 1970–1971 and Oedipal Knowledge* [2011] (2014), 4.

[29] Foucault, *The Use of Pleasure*, 26–29 and 39.

[30] James D. Faubion, *An Anthropology of Ethics* (2011); see also for a recent overview Paolo Heywood, "The Two Faces of Michel Foucault", in *The Cambridge Handbook for the Anthropology of Ethics*, ed. James Laidlaw (2023), 130-154.

weight or robustness. On the contrary, much of Foucault's analyses try to account for the fact that all these truths, facts, natures and realities "really" came into being and acquired validity—and how hard it is to even imagine them otherwise. Revealing these emergences as specific, historical and empirical, as it were, means depriving them of any appearance of naturalness or necessity they might surround themselves with. "Politics" here means: contingency, power relations, struggles, complications and non-linearity, but also the potentiality of transformation.

Taking up Foucault's work from this methodological side and paying attention to his manner of doing philosophy rather than to his specific historical results allows us to argue for two entries into contemporary philosophical debates. Both aim to continue and develop specific aspects of Foucault's philosophizing; they are inspired by—and critically loyal to—his method. Yet, both are equally animated by the strong conviction that we should not remain committed to simply commenting on his work in his own time but to working on our problems of our time with Foucauldian or Post-Foucauldian tools.

CRITICAL ONTOLOGY

It sounds wrong to attribute to Foucault the program of actualizing traditional ontology in the classical sense, i.e., an encompassing theory of all beings in their unity and coherence—a *metaphysica generalis*. Foucault's methodological anti-dogmatism and anti-universalism seem to undermine any attempts in this direction. Despite all differences, Foucault seems to faithfully follow the Kantian revolution that turns away from the classical metaphysical urge to talk dogmatically about things as they are and to embark on a critical, reflexive project of elucidating the conditions under which we can know and experience anything at all. While it is certainly possible to construe Foucault as a radicalized Kantian who took this reflexive self-critique even further, one must keep in mind that he certainly does not ground this project in a philosophy of the subject. Unsurprisingly, one can also read his work from the other side—from the side of the objects themselves. In this sense, Foucault (also) seems to ask how those came about and how they came into view as possible objects of knowledge and experience in the first place. This does not undo the Kantian turn of perspective completely, but it opens a path to question the very nature, status and reality of those objects (many of which turn out to be not unrelated to subjects—in plural ways). In this way, he reopens the space for ontological questions.[31]

In the case of many French philosophers of Foucault's and the previous generation, matters get even more complicated because of the incessant influence of the early Heidegger and his "existential" or "fundamental ontology" that had already left its mark

[31] Johanna Oksala, "Foucault's Politicization of Ontology," *Continental Philosophy Review* 43 (2010), 445-466; Martin Saar and Frieder Vogelmann, "Foucault und die Ontologie. Eine Debatte," in *Leben Regieren. Biotechnologien, Natur und Gesellschaft im 21. Jahrhundert*, eds. Katharina Hoppe, Jonas Rüppel, Torsten H. Voigt and Franziska von Verschuer (2023). In the latter text, we have focused on the systematic differences between critical ontology and political epistemology; here, we attempt to bring out the substantial methodological agreement on which they both rest.

on the works of Sartre, Lévinas, Merleau-Ponty and others in the 1930s and 1940s.[32] Texts from the later Heidegger, like the famous "Letter on Humanism", published in German and in French in 1947, or the lectures on Nietzsche, were immensely formative in the 1960s and influenced Derrida, Lacan and even Althusser to a degree. The early Foucault was definitely affected by this influence, too, as is well documented.[33] However, the terms "ontology" and "ontological" in the Heideggerian lexicon have become so overdetermined and even turned against their former, classically metaphysical meaning that they have changed their meaning drastically.

It is in the more classical sense of the term when Foucault implies that he has no interest in constructing "a metaphysics or an ontology of power" but in the question "how is power exercised?"[34] Yet, in a small number of crucial passages, Foucault himself uses the formulas "critical ontology" or "historical ontology of ourselves", often referring to the genealogical scrutiny of the emergence of self-understandings and identifications and the critical work of dissolving certainties and naturalizations. The most prominent formulations occur in Foucault's late commentary on Kant's "What is Enlightenment?", where he credits Kant with asking all the right questions:

> It seems to me that Kant's reflection is even a way of philosophizing that has not been without its importance or effectiveness during the last two centuries. The critical ontology of ourselves has to be considered not, certainly, as a theory, a doctrine, nor even as a permanent body of knowledge that is accumulating; it has to be conceived as an attitude, an ethos, a philosophical life in which the critique of what we are is at one and the same time the historical analysis of the limits that are imposed on us and an experiment with the possibility of going beyond them.[35]

This is not only a negative, destructive task: "we must obviously give a more positive content to what may be a philosophical *êthos* consisting in a critique of what we are saying, thinking and doing, through a historical ontology of ourselves".[36] Foucault's program is no general theory but highly contextual and contemporary: "I mean that this work done at the limits of ourselves must, on the one hand, open up a realm of historical inquiry and, on the other, put itself to the test of reality, of contemporary reality, both to grasp the points where change is possible and desirable, and to determine the precise form this change should take."[37] This aspiration realizes itself in the three major domains of problematizations defined by Foucault's work that we have briefly discussed in the previous section:

---

[32] Dominique Janicaud, *Heidegger en France* (2001).

[33] Alan Milchman and Alan Rosenberg, ed., *Foucault and Heidegger: Critical Encounters* (2003); Martin Saar, "Heidegger und Michel Foucault. Prägung ohne Zentrum," in *Heidegger-Handbuch*, ed. Dieter Thomä (2013).

[34] Michel Foucault, "The Subject and Power" [1980], in *Essential Works of Foucault 1954-1984. Vol. 3: Power* (2000), 337.

[35] Foucault, "What is Enlightenment?", 319.

[36] "What is Enlightenment?", 315.

[37] "What is Enlightenment?," 316.

> […] we have three axes whose specificity and whose interconnections have to be analyzed: the axis of knowledge, the axis of power, the axis of ethics. In other terms, the historical ontology of ourselves has to answer an open series of questions; it has to make an indefinite number of inquiries which may be multiplied and specified as much as we like, but which will all address the questions systematized as follows: How are we constituted as subjects of our own knowledge? How are we constituted as subjects who exercise or submit to power relations? How are we constituted as moral subjects of our own actions?[38]

This line of thought stresses that philosophical critique does not restrict itself to the cognitive or discursive realm but actually affects what we "are" in our being. It has been accepted and taken up by many philosophers working in the wake of Foucault or with interests similar to his. Judith Butler might be the most prominent among them, having projected elements of a "relational social ontology" in the last two decades that elaborates and further develops Foucault's formulation.[39] However, we want to highlight that from this point of departure it is easy to enter into a dialogue with a plethora of current developments in the humanities that claim a "return to ontology" or an "ontological turn". Instances of such claims can be found most prominently in anthropology but also in feminist theory, critical social theory, analytic metaphysics, post-Marxist political theory and Cultural Studies. Sometimes they are connected to an emphasis on materiality and objecthood and have some overlap with the—again: rather heterogeneous—theoretical movement now known as New Materialism.[40] While some of the proponents of these debates signal their distance from Foucault and his alleged exclusive focus on discourse and meaning, others credit him as a forerunner of a differently ontological and/or materialist thinking.[41]

It would be a challenging but worthwhile task to map these various debates and analyze the shifting meanings the reference to Foucault has and has had in them, but this would be the task for another paper (and other authors). Nevertheless, let us flag these discussions and the stakes for philosophy they contain: Foucault can be read and used as an entry into the debate on how to rethink ontology as a theoretical enterprise under current conditions and how to think "our" being and its emergence and transformation. While this has been taken up by many other disciplines, as just mentioned, it does remain a profoundly philosophical question, and it also involves contemporary philosophy's relation to its own metaphysical past, the Kantian revolution, the Heidegger moment, and the future of post-dogmatic, post-foundationalist and post-metaphysical or maybe neo-metaphysical thinking.

---

[38] "What is Enlightenment?," 318.

[39] Judith Butler, *Frames of War: When Is Life Grievable?* (2009), 184; see Arto Charpentier, "On Judith Butler's 'Ontological Turn'," *Raisons politiques* 76:4 (2019).

[40] For an introduction see *New Materialisms: Ontology, Agency, and Politics*, eds. Diana Coole and Samantha Frost (2010).

[41] For this discussion, see Thomas Lemke, *The Government of Things: Foucault and the New Materialisms* (2021).

Let us just name some conceptual essentials that a Foucauldian inspiration might bring to this discussion: Such an ontology will be essentially historical and will leave behind the aspiration to provide a perspective on eternal, unchanging essences. On the contrary, a Foucauldian or Post-Foucauldian historical ontology will place all emphasis on the emergence of entities and their historical transformation. Given that all of its objects, namely all the things, subjects and institutions in our social world are inherently dynamic, this ontology will have to be dynamic or processual too.[42] It will not be anthropocentric, in that it will not omit the non-human, non-organic factors, but it will be especially concerned with the feedback loops and recursive ontological effects that occur when human beings (expressing their status as "human kinds", to use Hacking's phrase) change their nature and that of others by actively transforming their own being.[43] This is also congenial to the idea of a "weak ontology" that bids farewell to all strong metaphysical aspirations.[44] Such an ontology will still be a strict and formal philosophical exercise, but it will not claim an ultra-objective, metaphysical point of view. Instead, it will allow for plural and perspectival insights that never lose sight of the social and political conditions of ontological description and theorizing itself. In so doing, it will remain "post-foundationalist" in the sense given to the word by the discussions on Left-Heideggerianism and "political ontology" after Laclau.[45] These philosophical reflections remain within the orbit of the ontological but conceive it as intricately linked with the empirical and political. They still try to account for the reality and materiality, i.e., the very being, of ourselves and of the world around us.

It may come as no surprise that many current theories invested in a certain kind of ontological vocabulary do this in view of environmental or ecological questions, since the perspective of an impending ecological disaster is nothing less than a question of being (and of nothingness). It seems as if nature has returned as an ultra-reality escaping all too-easy theoretical and practical capture. This is a topic only marginally present on the Foucauldian archipelago, the fascinating remarks on "environmentality" being the evident exception, marginal and underdeveloped as they are.[46]

However, the whole ecological complex might be approached most fruitfully from a Post-Foucauldian, ontological point of view. For it is exactly the historicist interest in processes of emergence, stabilization and deconstitution that are the preferred objects for such a kind of inquiry. And it is with the tool of a three-dimensional form of analysis

---

[42] Emmanuel Renault, "Critical Theory and Processual Social Ontology," *Journal of Social Ontology* 2:1 (2016.).
[43] Ian Hacking, *Historical Ontology* (2002); Arnold I. Davidson, *The Emergence of Sexuality: Historical Epistemology and the Formation of Concepts* (2002).
[44] Stephen K. White, *Sustaining Affirmation: The Strengths of Weak Ontology in Political Theory* (2000).
[45] Martin Saar, "What is Political Ontology? Review of: Oliver Marchart: Die politische Differenz. Zum Denken des Politischen bei Nancy, Lefort, Badiou, Laclau und Agamben. Berlin 2010: Suhrkamp," *Krisis: Journal for Contemporary Philosophy* 12:1 (2012).
[46] *The Birth of Biopolitics*, 261 (the translation has "environmentalism" for environmentalité); see Timothy W. Luke, "On Environmentality: Geo-Power and Eco-Knowledge in the Discourses of Contemporary Environmentalism," *Cultural Critique* 31 (1995); Lemke, *The Government of Things*, ch. 8, 168–190.

(pertaining to: knowledge/science; power/politics; subjectivity/ethics) that these issues might be approached in a way that can help us understand, first, the deep cognitive-discursive causes of a crisis; second, the social dynamics and power-struggles that structure its handling; and third, the deep-rooted mentalities and dispositions on an ethico-political plane that are unable to transform despite the urgent necessity to do so. Critically understanding eco-knowledge, eco-power and eco-subjects is an ontological enterprise because it tries to understand "our" being, today, in all its constraints and potentialities.

POLITICAL EPISTEMOLOGY

As in the case of ontology, engaging in epistemology might seem an unlikely choice for Foucauldian or Post-Foucauldian philosophers. After all, Foucault frequently sets aside epistemological questions if not criticizes the "analytics of truth".[47] Yet again, the verdict against epistemology holds true only for a traditional conception of it, narrowly defined as the attempt to analyze forms of knowledge, justification and reason tied to the cognitive capacities of generic and a-social, perhaps even transcendental subjects. The rise of "social epistemology" since the 1990s has at least partly broadened the scope of mainstream epistemology, although it remains torn between programs merely expanding traditional epistemology's assumptions and analyses on the one hand and programs seeking to criticize and revise those assumptions on the other.[48] As the name "social epistemology" therefore remains ambiguous, we prefer to use "political epistemology", which includes critical approaches in social epistemology but is even wider. It starts from the fact that reason, truth and knowledge are social phenomena. Yet, it insists on the politically significant further insight that epistemic phenomena do not just exist in social practices ridden with conflicts but are constituted by those conflictual practices which they in turn shape.

Understood in this broad sense as intertwining epistemology with social and political theory, political epistemology is nothing new. All critical theories have, in some way or other, engaged in it to criticize traditional epistemologies that idealize away the sociomaterial conditions of epistemic phenomena. In Frankfurt School critical theory, political epistemology became necessary to distinguish the specific form of critical from traditional theory and to account for central concepts such as ideology that describe a particular combination of knowledge and domination.[49] In feminist theory, the epistemic success of feminist interventions into the natural and social sciences gave rise to feminist epistemology, a whole research field that tries to better understand the gendered nature of reason and

[47] See, e.g., Michel Foucault, *The Government of Self and Others: Lectures at the Collège de France 1982–1983* [2008] (2010), 20; Michel Foucault, *Discourse & Truth and Parrēsia* [2016] (2019), 224.

[48] For an overview with sympathies for the second program, see Martin Kusch, "Social Epistemology," in *The Routledge Companion to Epistemology*, ed. Sven Bernecker and Duncan Pritchard (2011).

[49] Max Horkheimer, "Traditional and Critical Theory" [1937], in *Critical Theory. Selected Essays* (2002); Theodor W. Adorno, "Ideology" [1954], in *Aspects of Sociology*, ed. Frankfurt Institute for Social Research (1973).

knowledge[50] and to give a realistic account of the productive role of non-epistemic values in scientific practices.[51] Post- and decolonial theory has, for a long time, been analyzing the unequal creation, distribution and acceptance of knowledge according to its concrete location to uncover the highly unjust "geopolitics of knowledge".[52] Belatedly, analytic philosophy discovered political epistemology in different forms too.[53]

A Foucauldian perspective in political epistemology starts, of course, from the familiar concept of "power-knowledge", that is, from the premise that power, knowledge and subjectivity are internally related:

> We should admit rather that power produces knowledge (and not simply by encouraging it because it serves power or by applying it because it is useful); that power and knowledge directly imply one another; that there is no power relation without the correlative constitution of a field of knowledge, nor any knowledge that does not presuppose and constitute at the same time power relations. These 'power-knowledge relations' are to be analysed, therefore, not on the basis of a subject of knowledge who is or is not free in relation to the power system, but, on the contrary, the subject who knows, the objects to be known and the modalities of knowledge must be regarded as so many effects of these fundamental implications of power-knowledge and their historical transformations.[54]

However, political epistemology after and following Foucault will have to do more than just restate this premise or show once again that it does not reduce reason or knowledge to power or politics.[55] It must also address the epistemological questions that Foucault mostly relegated to the side and that Foucauldians have not often been willing to engage with:[56] How do we build a "non-sovereign" epistemology that can explicate the concept of truth as a standard of epistemic validity in a way compatible with its historicization

[50] See Donna J. Haraway, "Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective," *Feminist Studies* 14:3 (1988); Alison Wylie, "Feminist Philosophy of Science: Standpoint Matters," *Proceedings and Addresses of the American Philosophical Association* 86:2 (2012).

[51] See Sandra Harding, *Whose Science? Whose Knowledge? Thinking from Women's Lives* (1991); Helen E. Longino, *Science as Social Knowledge: Values and Objectivity in Scientific Inquiry* (1990).

[52] Walter D. Mignolo, "The Geopolitics of Knowledge and the Colonial Difference," *South Atlantic Quarterly* 101:1 (2002), 67. See already Enrique Dussel, *Philosophy of Liberation* [1980] (1985).

[53] See Miranda Fricker, *Epistemic Injustice: Power and the Ethics of Knowing* [2007] (2010); Michael Hannon and Jeroen De Ridder, eds., *The Routledge Handbook of Political Epistemology* (2021).

[54] Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* [1975] (1977), 27 f.

[55] For recent and convincingly argued accounts see, e.g., Amy Allen, "Power/Knowledge/Resistance: Foucault and Epistemic Injustice," in *The Routledge Handbook of Epistemic Injustice*, eds. Ian James Kidd, José Medina, and Gaile Pohlhaus, Jr. (2017); Daniele Lorenzini, *The Force of Truth: Critique, Genealogy, and Truth-Telling in Michel Foucault* (2023).

[56] Of course, there are exceptions: see, e.g., the (very different) accounts by Linda Martín Alcoff, "Foucault as Epistemologist," *Philosophical Forum* 25:2 (1993); Joseph Rouse, "Foucault and the Natural Sciences," in *Foucault and the Critique of Institutions*, eds. John Caputo and Mark Yount (1993); C. G. Prado, *Searle and Foucault on Truth* (2006).

and intertwinement with power?[57] How do we conceptualize knowledge as distinct from mere beliefs and opinions yet bound to changing historical constellations? How do we defend scientific practices and results against today's science deniers without immunizing the sciences from criticism and without idealizing knowledge away from its socio-material conditions of existence? Foucault's proposal that epistemic validity is socially and materially situated and that we should recognize the socio-material conditions of alethic existence is an important first step—but it is only a first step. To answer the questions just listed, which concern political epistemology's basic concepts (and could be easily multiplied), we must go beyond Foucault's refusal to engage with epistemology proper.[58]

Yet, there are further important research questions for political epistemology after and following Foucault. While we only want to mention the necessity to engage with self-reflexive, meta-philosophical questions that turn on the socio-material conditions of alethic existence of philosophical knowledge, including the knowledge produced in political epistemology itself, we want to emphasize that there are "first-order" questions too. After all, political epistemology is called for, in the first place, because we want to address contemporary debates such as the current problematization of untruths in politics, unfolding awkwardly and confused under the terms "post-truth" or "fake news".[59] It calls for a clarification on multiple fronts, but two seem especially important: First, instead of lumping together all untruths, we should reconsider, from the perspective of Foucauldian or Post-Foucauldian political epistemology, the many kinds of untruths in politics that we already know: ideologies, propaganda, political lies or bullshit. Some of these concepts might need serious re-interpretation; for example, ideology has often been taken to be incompatible with Foucault's conceptualization of power-knowledge. Yet, we think that it is time to move past his (often not very convincing) rejections of the concept to instead find a conceptualization of ideology that is compatible with a non-sovereign political epistemology.[60] The general idea is to distinguish two levels of analysis. On the first level, we find the socio-economic conditions of alethic existence, which, as Foucault's historical studies demonstrate, for the most part change very slowly. They form a relatively stable foundation of wide-ranging regimes of truth by determining which statements are truth-apt. Yet, there is also a second level of analysis that attends to what happens within those regimes of truth. And here, we argue, it does make sense to introduce the concepts of ideology, propaganda, political lies etc. For not every departure from the agreed-upon

---

[57] Joseph Rouse, "Beyond Epistemic Sovereignty," in *The Disunity of Science: Boundaries, Contexts, Power*, ed. Peter Galison and David Stump (1996).

[58] See Frieder Vogelmann, *Die Wirksamkeit des Wissens. Eine politische Epistemologie* (2022).

[59] See, e.g., Lee McIntyre, *Post-Truth* (2018); Vincent F. Hendricks and Mads Vestergaard, *Reality Lost: Markets of Attention, Misinformation and Manipulation* (2018); Steve Fuller, *Post-Truth: Knowledge as a Power Game* (2018). For a critique and a constructive reconceptualization of this debate, see Frieder Vogelmann, "The Problem of Post-Truth: Rethinking the Relationship between Truth and Politics," *Behemoth: A Journal on Civilisation* 11:2 (2018).

[60] As does, for example, Christian Schmidt, "'Ein Grundbegriff, den man nicht verwenden kann, ohne Vorkehrungen zu treffen'. Michel Foucaults Beitrag zur Analyse und Kritik von Ideologien," in *Die Rückkehr der Ideologie. Zur Gegenwart eines Schlüsselbegriffs*, eds. Heiko Beyer and Alexandra Schauer (2021).

consensus should be considered as an attempt to establish an alternative regime of truth. Obviously false statements, in particular, often serve to exert and display power by forcing others to accept publicly what they know to be false. Using untruths in this manner does not challenge the current regime of truth but exploits it.[61] Similarly, ideologies operate within regimes of truth and are bound to their conditions of alethic existence. While we cannot pursue the complex philosophical questions raised by such a proposal here, it does open a conceptual space to work on urgent political and epistemological issues without falling behind Foucault's insights or merely repeating them.

Second, folded into the current problematization of untruth in politics is a debate about the role of scientific practices in democracy. This debate seems stuck in the false alternative between a wholesale rejection or denial of scientific results and practices on the one hand and a blind idealization of "science" on the other hand that neither cares for actual scientific practices nor allows their nuanced and critical interrogation. Interestingly, the baseless attacks on the sciences as well as the naïve defense of them often rely on an oversimplified understanding of scientific practices searching for timeless truths free from social and political conflicts.[62] Whereas its defenders seem to think that this idealization is necessary for preserving the epistemic authority of scientific knowledge, the attackers use that very idealization against actual existing scientific practices, which, messy social practices that they are, can never live up to it.

Political epistemology after and following Foucault offers a way out of this dilemma because it starts from the realization that "truth is a thing of this world"[63] and does not reside in some noumenal realm. Hence it makes little sense to defend scientific practices by trying to purify them from all non-epistemic interests, values and conflicts that they invariably include. Instead, a political epistemology after and following Foucault, as well as many of the contributions in philosophy of science that do take history and power relations seriously, attempt to explain how scientific practices can achieve knowledge because of their impurity.[64] What remains specific to Foucauldian and Post-Foucauldian political epistemology, however, is its critical perspective on the sciences. This critique takes off by employing the three-pronged analytic framework of knowledge, power and subjectivities in order to historicize and de-naturalize scientific practices and results without simply denying their importance or validity. Science, as it were, is as much a part of our

[61] See Frieder Vogelmann, "Should Critique be Tamed by Realism? A Defense of Radical Critiques of Reason," *Genealogy+Critique* 5:1 (2019), 23–25. Cf. Susanne Krasmann, "Secrecy and the Force of Truth: Countering Post-Truth Regimes," *Cultural Studies* 33:4 (2019) for a different opinion.

[62] On this (slightly polemical) diagnosis, see Frieder Vogelmann, *Umkämpfte Wissenschaften – zwischen Idealisierung und Verachtung* (2023).

[63] Michel Foucault, "Truth and Power" [1977], in *Essential Works of Michel Foucault 1954–1984. Vol. 3: Power*, ed. James Faubion (1998), 131.

[64] For recent non-idealizing perspectives from philosophy of science, see, for example, Hasok Chang, *Realism for Realistic People: A New Pragmatist Philosophy of Science* (2022); Nancy Cartwright et al., *The Tangle of Science: Reliability Beyond Method, Rigour, and Objectivity* (2022). Contributions from feminists and Foucauldians include Longino, *Science as Social Knowledge*; Joseph Rouse, *Knowledge and Power: Toward a Political Philosophy of Science* (1987).

contemporary politics of truth as its contestation, but this does not make it a weak or contingent institution. On the contrary, in the contemporary regime of truth, it has acquired an unparalleled epistemic authority, and some of the sciences—e.g., the natural sciences, of course, but also economics, medicine or jurisprudence—do indeed have the kind of superiority over other epistemic practices that warrants critical attention and interventions targeting the very form of knowledge they produce, the institutions they inhabit and the specific subjects they form.

CONCLUSION

We started from Foucault's ambivalent relation to philosophy as an object of study and a practice he was engaged in, as best seen from his discussion in *Le discours philosophique*. To address the question of what philosophizing after and following Foucault might mean today, we have argued for a methodological approach. Rather than building on one of his many diagnoses, we have sought to argue for continuing his analytic heuristic with its three dimensions of power, knowledge and subjectivity. On each of them, Foucault shifts the perspective from the given legitimacies, norms, identities and selves to their historical, conflict-ridden genesis.

This "politics of truth" may disturb philosophical business as usual, but it allows the development of something like Foucauldian or Post-Foucauldian programs of critical ontology and political epistemology that remain in contact and debate with current philosophy in the academic, disciplinary sense but also extend the range of arguments and materials usually deployed there. Using the examples of ecological questions and of the problematization of untruths in politics, we have outlined why pursuing these paths might be worthwhile or even urgent. At the heart of philosophizing after and following Foucault lies the shift from beginning with the given norms, institutions, identities or selves to a critical diagnosis of the "politics of truth" involved in their conflict-ridden emergence to open up alternative ways of thinking, acting and being. Foucault might have toyed with the idea of leaving philosophy behind for good, but following him need not imply that. He has perhaps only interpreted philosophy in a specific way; the point, however, is to change it.

References

Adorno, Theodor W., "Ideology" [1954], in *Aspects of Sociology*, ed. Frankfurt Institute for Social Research, 182–205. Boston: Beacon Press, 1973.

Alcoff, Linda Martín, "Foucault as Epistemologist," *Philosophical Forum* 25:2 (1993), 95–124.

Allen, Amy, "Power/Knowledge/Resistance: Foucault and Epistemic Injustice", in *The Routledge Handbook of Epistemic Injustice*, eds. Ian James Kidd, José Medina and Gaile Pohlhaus, Jr., 187–194. London/New York: Routledge, 2017.

Artières, Philippe and Jean-François Bert, eds., *Les mots et les choses de Michel Foucault: Regards critiques 1966-1968*. Caen: Presses universitaires de Caen/IMEC, 2009.

Bert, François, ed., *Histoire de la folie à l'âge classique de Michel Foucault: Regards critiques 1961-2011*. Caen: Presses universitaires de Caen/IMEC, 2011.

Bröckling, Ulrich, Susanne Krasmann, and Thomas Lemke, eds., *Governmentality: Current Issues and Future Challenges*. New York: Routledge, 2010.

Butler, Judith, *Frames of War: When Is Life Grievable?*. London: Verso, 2009.

Cartwright, Nancy, Jeremy Hardie, Eleonora Montuschi, Matthew Soleiman, and Ann C. Thresher, *The Tangle of Science: Reliability Beyond Method, Rigour, and Objectivity*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022.

Chang, Hasok, *Realism for Realistic People: A New Pragmatist Philosophy of Science*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022.

Charpentier, Arto, "On Judith Butler's 'Ontological Turn'," *Raisons politiques* 76:4 (2019), 43-54. https://doi.org/10.3917/rai.076.0043

Cisney, Vernon W., and Nicolae Morar, eds., *Biopower: Foucault and Beyond*. Edited by Vernon W. Cisney and Nicolae Morar. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2015.

Coole, Diana and Samantha Frost, eds., *New Materialisms: Ontology, Agency, and Politics*. Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2010.

Davidson, Arnold I., *The Emergence of Sexuality: Historical Epistemology and the Formation of Concepts*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2002.

Dussel, Enrique, *Philosophy of Liberation* [1980]. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1985.

Elden, Stuart, *The Archaeology of Foucault*. Cambridge: Polity, 2023.

Erlenbusch-Anderson, Verena, "Philosophical Practice Following Foucault," *Foucault Studies* 25 (2018), 55–83. https://doi.org/10.22439/fs.v25i2.5574

Eribon, Didier, *Michel Foucault* [1989]. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991.

Faubion, James D., *An Anthropology of Ethics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011.

Foucault, Michel, *The Archaeology of Knowledge and The Discourse on Language* [1969]. New York: Vintage Books, 2010.

Foucault, Michel, *The Birth of Biopolitics: Lectures at the Collège de France 1978–1979* [2004]. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008.

Foucault, Michel, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* [1975]. New York: Vintage Books, 1977.

Foucault, Michel, *Le discours philosophique*. eds. François Ewald, Orazio Irrera and Daniele Lorenzini. Paris: EHESS/Gallimard/Seuil, 2023.

Foucault, Michel, *La constitution d'un transcendantal historique dans la Phénoménologie de l'esprit de Hegel: Mémoire du diplôme d'études supérieures de philosophie* [1949], ed. Christophe Bouton. Paris: Vrin, 2024.

Foucault, Michel, *Discourse & Truth and Parrēsia* [2016]. Chicago/London: The University of Chicago Press, 2019.

Foucault, Michel, *The Government of Self and Others: Lectures at the Collège de France 1982–1983* [2008]. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010.

Foucault, Michel, *The History of Sexuality. Volume I: An Introduction* [1976]. New York: Pantheon Books, 1978.

Foucault, Michel, *Lectures on the Will to Know: Lectures at the College de France 1970–1971 and Oedipal Knowledge* [2011]. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014.

Foucault, Michel, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* [1966]. London and New York: Routledge, 1970.

Foucault, Michel, *Security, Territory, Population: Lectures at the College de France 1977–1978* [2004]. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007.

Foucault, Michel, "The Subject and Power" [1980], in *Essential Works of Foucault 1954-1984. Vol. 3: Power*, ed. Paul Rabinow, 326–348. New York: New Press, 2000.

Foucault, Michel, "Structuralism and Post-Structuralism" [1983], in *Essential Works of Michel Foucault 1954–1984. Vol. 2: Aesthetics, Method, and Epistemology*, ed. James Faubion, 433–458. New York: The New Press, 1998.

Foucault, Michel, "Truth and Power" [1977], in *Essential Works of Michel Foucault 1954–1984. Vol. 3: Power*, ed. James Faubion, 111–133. New York: The New Press, 1998.

Foucault, Michel, *The Use of Pleasure. Volume 2 of the History of Sexuality* [1984]. New York: Vintage Books, 1990.

Foucault, Michel, "What is Enlightenment?" [1984], in *Essential Works of Michel Foucault 1954–1984. Vol. 1: Ethics, Subjectivity and Truth*, ed. Paul Rabinow, 303–319. London: Penguin, 1997.

Foucault, Michel, "Who are you, Professor Foucault?" [1967], in *Religion and Culture*, ed. Jeremy R. Carrette, 87–103. New York: Routledge, 1999.

Fricker, Miranda, *Epistemic Injustice. Power and the Ethics of Knowing* [2007]. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010.

Fuggle, Sophie, Yari Lanci, and Martina Tazzioli, eds., *Foucault and the History of Our Present*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015.

Fuller, Steve, *Post-Truth. Knowledge as a Power Game*. London: Anthem Press, 2018.

Gehring, Petra, and Andreas Gelhard, eds., *Parrhesia. Foucaults letzte Vorlesungen – philosophisch, philologisch, politisch*. Zürich/Berlin: Diaphanes, 2012.

Gutting, Gary, "Review of Beatrice Han: Foucault's Critical Projekt," *Notre Dame Philosophical Reviews*, 2003, https://ndpr.nd.edu/reviews/foucault-s-critical-project/ (accessed February 16, 2024,).

Gutting, Gary, *Thinking the Impossible. French Philosophy since 1960*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011.

Hacking, Ian, *Historical Ontology*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002.

Hannon, Michael, and Jeroen De Ridder, eds., *The Routledge Handbook of Political Epistemology*. London/New York: Routledge, 2021.

Han-Pile, Beatrice, *Foucault's Critical Project: Between the Transcendental and the Historical*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002.

Haraway, Donna J., "Situated Knowledges. The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective," *Feminist Studies* 14:3 (1988), 575–599. https://doi.org/10.2307/3178066.

Harding, Sandra, *Whose Science? Whose Knowledge? Thinking from Women's Lives*. Milton Keynes: Open University Press, 1991.

Hendricks, Vincent F., and Mads Vestergaard, *Reality Lost. Markets of Attention, Misinformation and Manipulation*. New York: Springer Nature 2018.

Heywood, Paolo, "The Two Faces of Michel Foucault," in *The Cambridge Handbook for the Anthropology of Ethics*, ed. James Laidlaw. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2023, 130-154.

Horkheimer, Max, "Traditional and Critical Theory," in *Critical Theory. Selected Essays*, 188–243. New York: The Continuum Publishing Company, 2002.

Janicaud, Dominique, *Heidegger en France*, 2 vols., Paris: Albin Michel, 2001.

Krasmann, Susanne, "Secrecy and the Force of Truth. Countering Post-Truth Regimes," *Cultural Studies* 33:4 (2019), 690–710. https://doi.org/10.1080/09502386.2018.1503696

Kusch, Martin, "Social Epistemology," in *The Routledge Companion to Epistemology*, ed. Sven Bernecker and Duncan Pritchard, 873–884. New York: Routledge, 2011.

Lemke, Thomas, *The Government of Things: Foucault and the New Materialisms*. New York: New York University Press, 2021.

Longino, Helen E., *Science as Social Knowledge. Values and Objectivity in Scientific Inquiry*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990.

Lorenzini, Daniele, *The Force of Truth. Critique, Genealogy, and Truth-Telling in Michel Foucault*. Chicago/London: The University of Chicago Press, 2023.

Luke, Timothy W., "On Environmentality: Geo-Power and Eco-Knowledge in the Discourses of Contemporary Environmentalism," *Cultural Critique* 31 (1995), 57–81.

Lyons, David, ed., *Theorizing Surveillance. The Panopticon and Beyond*. Cullompton: Willan Publishing, 2006.

McIntyre, Lee, *Post-Truth*. Cambridge and London: MIT Press, 2018.

Mignolo, Walter D., "The Geopolitics of Knowledge and the Colonial Difference," *South Atlantic Quarterly* 101:1 (2002), 57–96. https://doi.org/10.1215/00382876-101-1-57

Milchman, Alan and Alan Rosenberg, ed., *Foucault and Heidegger: Critical Encounters*. Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2003.

Oksala, Johanna, "Foucault's Politicization of Ontology," *Continental Philosophy Review* 43 (2010), 445-466. http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/s11007-010-9153-6

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

Renault, Emmanuel, "Critical Theory and Processual Social Ontology," *Journal of Social Ontology* 2:1 (2016), 17-32.

Rouse, Joseph, "Beyond Epistemic Sovereignty," in *The Disunity of Science. Boundaries, Contexts, Power*, ed. Peter Galison and David Stump, 398–416. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996.

Rouse, Joseph, "Foucault and the Natural Sciences," in *Foucault and the Critique of Institutions*, ed. John Caputo and Mark Yount, 137–162. University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1993.

Rouse, Joseph, *Knowledge and Power. Toward a Political Philosophy of Science*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1987.

Saar, Martin, *Genealogie als Kritik. Geschichte und Theorie des Subjekts nach Nietzsche und Foucault*. Frankfurt/M., New York: Campus, 2007.

Saar, Martin, "Understanding Genealogy: History, Power, and the Self," *Journal for the Philosophy of History* 2:2 (2008), 295-314.

Saar, Martin, "Philosophie in ihrer (und gegen ihre) Zeit," *Deutsche Zeitschrift für Philosophie* 67:1 (2019), 1–22. https://doi.org/10.1515/dzph-2019-0001

Saar, Martin, "After the Endgames: What was and what is Philosophy?," *Philosophy, Politics and Critique* 1:1 (2024), 112–115.

Saar, Martin, "Heidegger und Michel Foucault: Prägung ohne Zentrum," in *Heidegger-Handbuch*, ed. Dieter Thomä. Stuttgart: Metzler, 2013, 448–454.

Saar, Martin, "What is Political Ontology? Review of: Oliver Marchart: Die politische Differenz. Zum Denken des Politischen bei Nancy, Lefort, Badiou, Laclau und Agamben. Berlin 2010: Suhrkamp," *Krisis: Journal for Contemporary Philosophy* 12:1 (2012), 79–84. https://archive.krisis.eu/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/krisis-2012-1-09-saar.pdf (accessed February 16, 2024).

Saar, Martin and Frieder Vogelmann, "Foucault und die Ontologie. Eine Debatte," in *Leben Regieren. Biotechnologien, Natur und Gesellschaft im 21. Jahrhundert*, eds. Katharina Hoppe, Jonas Rüppel, Torsten H. Voigt and Franziska von Verschuer. Frankfurt am Main and New York: Campus, 2023, S. 231–248.

Schmidt, Christian, "'Ein Grundbegriff, den man nicht verwenden kann, ohne Vorkehrungen zu treffen'. Michel Foucaults Beitrag zur Analyse und Kritik von Ideologien," in *Die Rückkehr der Ideologie. Zur Gegenwart eines Schlüsselbegriffs*, eds. Heiko Beyer and Alexandra Schauer, 85–109. Frankfurt a. M./New York: Campus, 2021.

Vogelmann, Frieder, "Der Weisheit Freund und aller Welt Feind? Philosophie mit, in und gegen die Welt," *Deutsche Zeitschrift für Philosophie* 71:2 (2023), 157–177. https://doi.org/10.1515/dzph-2023-0016

Vogelmann, Frieder, *Die Wirksamkeit des Wissens. Eine politische Epistemologie*. Berlin: Suhrkamp, 2022.

Vogelmann, Frieder, "Foucaults parrhesia – Philosophie als Politik der Wahrheit," in *Parrhesia. Foucaults letzte Vorlesungen – philosophisch, philologisch, politisch*, eds. Petra Gehring and Andreas Gelhard, 203–229. Zürich, Berlin: Diaphanes, 2012.

Vogelmann, Frieder, *Foucault lesen*. Wiesbaden: Springer VS, 2016.

Vogelmann, Frieder, "The Problem of Post-Truth. Rethinking the Relationship between Truth and Politics," *Behemoth: A Journal on Civilisation* 11:2 (2018), 18–37. https://doi.org/10.6094/behemoth.2018.11.2.986.

Vogelmann, Frieder, "Should Critique be Tamed by Realism? A Defense of Radical Critiques of Reason," *Genealogy+Critique* 5:1 (2019), 1–34. https://doi.org/10.16995/lefou.61.

Vogelmann, Frieder, *Umkämpfte Wissenschaften – zwischen Idealisierung und Verachtung*. Stuttgart: Reclam, 2023.

White, Stephen K., *Sustaining Affirmation: The Strengths of Weak Ontology in Political Theory*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000.

Wylie, Alison, "Feminist Philosophy of Science: Standpoint Matters," *Proceedings and Addresses of the American Philosophical Association* 86:2 (2012), 47–76.

Zerbib, David, "Unpublished works shed new light on Michel Foucault: Several experts explain how the treasures found in the philosopher's archives at the National Library of France elucidate Foucault's 'definition of philosophy'," *Le Monde online* (English), May 11, 2023, https://www.lemonde.fr/en/opinion/article/2023/05/11/unpublished-works-shed-new-light-on-michel-foucault_6026351_23.html (accessed February 16, 2024).

Author info

Martin Saar

saar@em.uni-frankfurt.de

Professor for Social Philosophy

Institute for Philosophy

Goethe University Frankfurt

Germany

Frieder Vogelmann

frieder.vogelmann@ucf.uni-freiburg.de

Professor for Epistemology and Theory of Science

University College Freiburg

Albert-Ludwigs-University Freiburg

Germany

Martin Saar is professor for social philosophy at Goethe University Frankfurt and a member of the board of the Institute for Social Research. His areas of interest refer to contemporary political and social philosophy and the history of political thought, with a special focus on Spinoza, Nietzsche, Foucault, Marxism, Critical Theory, and Post-structuralism.

Frieder Vogelmann is professor for epistemology and theory of science at the University of Freiburg. His research focus is on political epistemology, including both theoretical investigations of basic concepts as well as concrete phenomena like the rise of untruth in politics or the role of scientific practices in democracy. A recent book on these topics is *Die Wirksamkeit des Wissens. Eine politische Epistemologie* (Suhrkamp 2022).