

FOUCAULT

Foucault

Historian or Philosopher?

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Preface

Why write about Foucault? Just ten years ago, an English-speaking writer might have felt obliged to provide a detailed answer to this question, in terms of Michel Foucault's prestige in France and the intrinsic historical and philosophical interest of his work. Nowadays, this same writer could dispense with these lengthy introductions, and reply quite simply that it is not least because everybody else is writing about Foucault. In the vast literature Foucault's commentators have produced, certain questions appear again and again in one form or another: Unity or Fragmentation? Eternity or History? System or Difference? Philosophy or History? Jacques d'Hondt unwittingly sums up this discussion in a rather alarmist article about structuralism: 'Certain ages ruminate with a gloomy delectation over the question, to be or not to be. Times have changed! Our contemporaries pose quite another alternative: to break or not to break.'¹ In the present book it is this alternative that is posed in terms of an opposition between history and philosophy. In other words, this is a question of an opposition between a world view based on the belief that we are discontinuous and continually changing historical beings, and a world view which posits a small number of general principles valid for all times and places.

Which view or which combination of these views most accurately describes the reality of existence? Foucault's own solution to this problem was to write a *history of the limits*, of that edge between the orderly and historical systems societies impose upon the world (the Same), and that which is outside, or beyond that order (the Other). He often changed his mind about how this project should be carried out, but it was the constancy of a philosophical quest and a philosophical vision which led him to make these constant changes, shifts in emphasis, and reinterpretations of his work. Thus, during the 1960s, Foucault proposed a number of different limits which, each time, he thought finally explained the relation of the Same and the Other. During the 1970s, perhaps disappointed with his failure to find the final limit,

he proposed a system in which the Same and the Other were mutually coextensive, locked in an endless power-struggle. This vision changed again in 1982, when power disappeared from his analysis to be replaced by the idea that, as 'free beings' living in history, we must continue to work on the limits and ourselves.

Although most of Foucault's work will be discussed here, two writings in particular will act as a focal point for discussion. The first of these is *Histoire de la folie*, written at the beginning of Foucault's career and the second is 'What is Enlightenment?', written right at the end. The empirical details of Foucault's historical interpretations will not be discussed: this has been done elsewhere by a host of specialists. Neither will 'power' and related notions form as important a part of this study as they do in many other current English-language studies of Foucault's work. In general, Foucault's work will be dealt with in philosophical terms, as a historical, philosophical and ethical reflection on the 'limits' of history, society and culture.

At the same time, however, this work will be situated in its intellectual context, and extensive reference made to its reception in French and English. Such is the volume and the sheer diversity of the writing on Foucault, not to mention the fact that it spans several cultures, that its analysis poses complex difficulties, not least of classification and categorisation.

As Foucault himself remarked with a certain ill-disguised glee concerning merely his political classification:

I think I have in fact been situated in most of the squares on the political checkerboard . . . as anarchist, leftist, ostentatious or disguised Marxist, nihilist, explicit or secret anti-Marxist, technocrat in the service of Gaullism, new liberal, etc . . . None of these descriptions is important by itself; taken together, on the other hand, it means something. And I must admit that I rather like what they mean. It's true that I prefer not to identify myself and that I'm amused by the diversity of the ways I've been judged and classified.²

In consequence the examination of the secondary literature will be limited in a number of ways. First of all, only French and English-speaking literature, which forms the main body of writings on Foucault, will be dealt with. This will also provide an opportunity to look at some of the similarities and differences

between the French and Anglo-Saxon intellectual mentalities.³ Secondly, questions of empirical and specialised application will be put aside and a series of recurrent and important issues relating to philosophy and history will be addressed. In addition, the treatment of literature produced before Foucault's death in 1984, will be more comprehensive than the treatment of the literature after that date. To remain entirely up to date with every small element of this massive and ever more rapidly growing industry would be an impossible task that would fully occupy the most willing of writers, to the exclusion of time for their own considered contribution to discussion. Finally, in the context of a literature which is not, in the English-speaking world, particularly noted for its clarity or simplicity, there has been a consistent attempt to avoid certain types of jargon popular amongst 'foucauldians'. It is used only where it is absolutely unavoidable.

I am extremely grateful to the many people and institutions that have helped make this book a reality. Needless to say, as the cliché properly has it, any shortcomings that are apparent are entirely my own responsibility. I owe a very large debt, first of all to Paul Foss and Professor Randall Albury at the University of New South Wales, who originally introduced me to the work of Foucault. Over the years, Professor Albury's encouragement and discussion have been essential in seeing this project to its final completion. Also at the University of NSW, I would like to thank Professor Jarlath Ronayne and Professor Jean Chaussivert, members of the French Department, and Dr Patricia Brown for their support in various ways. A Postgraduate Research Award from the Australian Government and the Australian National University in Canberra made it possible to undertake research. And in Canberra, Professor Eugene Kamenka, and Dr Robert Brown of the History of Ideas Unit and Professor Genevieve Lloyd were the source of much help in refining and clarifying my ideas.

A French Government scholarship also provided me with the opportunity to conduct research in Paris. While I was there, many people gave me all sorts of practical and intellectual assistance. I owe a great deal, to begin with, to Michel Foucault himself who kindly agreed to talk about his ideas with me. I also wish to record

my considerable debt to the late Professor François Châtelet whose firsthand knowledge as a participant in recent French intellectual history and whose incisive and enthusiastic discussion of ideas were of the utmost assistance. Also in Paris, Professor Judith Robinson-Valéry provided invaluable practical help and advice. During my most recent trip to Paris, and since my return to Australia, I have greatly benefited from discussions and correspondence with Professor Pierre Bourdieu. He has also generously made his most recent publications available to me. In addition, I would like to thank François Ewald, director of the Centre Michel Foucault, whose invitation to an international conference on Foucault in January 1988 afforded me the unique opportunity of participating in a very stimulating and remarkable intellectual gathering.

At the University of Queensland, Dr Rod Girle and the other members of the Department of Philosophy and also members of the French Department, were particularly helpful, as were my students in the Department of Philosophy whose enthusiasm and questions were greatly appreciated. A Research Fellowship at the University of Melbourne has made it possible to complete the book and I wish to thank Dr Margaret Rose, in particular, for all her discussion, help and encouragement during the final stages. Professor Rod Home of the Department of History and Philosophy of Science has also been generous with his support. At other institutions, I am grateful to Professor Jean-Claude Guédon of the University of Montreal for his most enlightening comments, and to Dr Paul Patton for a number of lively and informative conversations.

Research for this book was undertaken at a range of libraries: the Bibliothèque Nationale and the well-stocked municipal lending libraries of Paris were especially useful. In Australia, the libraries of the Universities of NSW, Queensland, Melbourne, Sydney and the Australian National University as well as the Australian National Library and the State Library of Victoria have all become familiar territory. Thanks are also due to the Department of Immigration and Ethnic Affairs in Canberra for their generous study-leave provisions whilst I was in their employment. And I am indebted to Dianne Manning and the other typists at 'The Typist' in Canberra and to Robyn Keely and Lorraine Beck at the Melbourne Word Processing Centre who typed the manuscript very efficiently through many revisions and to impossible

deadlines. Angela Feery also kindly helped with proof-reading. Finally, I cannot thank my friends enough for all their unfailing support, especially Sally Hone, John Delaney and Michelle Walker, who by dint of various means of persuasion, encouragement and discussion saw me safely to the end of a long and difficult task. And of course, all of this would have been quite impossible without the essential and constant support of my family.

If this list of acknowledgements seems long and large, it nonetheless does no more than brief justice to the contribution of others to the life and labours of something of a 'wandering scholar'. Those medieval persons carried with them dedication and happiness, and the quest for true knowledge. I hope this work, pursued and compiled in many places, will be, however humbly, in that tradition.

CLARE O'FARRELL

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Abbreviations

A number of abbreviations have been used to refer to frequently cited works by Foucault. They are listed here in chronological order. Full references are included in the list of works cited at the end of the book.

MMP	<i>Maladie mentale et psychologie.</i>
FD	<i>Folie et Dérailson: Histoire de la folie à l'âge classique</i> 10/18 1961, abbreviated edition.
HF (1972)	<i>Histoire de la folie à l'âge classique</i> , edition including two annexes.
HF	<i>Histoire de la folie à l'âge classique</i> , 1976, edition without annexes.
M&C	<i>Madness and Civilization.</i>
NC	<i>Naissance de la clinique.</i>
BC	<i>Birth of the Clinic.</i>
MC	<i>Les Mots et les choses.</i>
OT	<i>The Order of Things.</i>
AS	<i>L'Archéologie du savoir.</i>
AK	<i>The Archaeology of Knowledge.</i>
OD	<i>L'Ordre du discours.</i>
SP	<i>Surveiller et punir.</i>
VS	<i>La Volonté de savoir.</i>
UP	<i>L'Usage des plaisirs.</i>
SS	<i>Le Souci de soi.</i>
PK	<i>Power/Knowledge</i> , ed. Colin Gordon.

When references to these texts have been made (with the exception of *Power/Knowledge*) the abbreviation has been included in the main text in brackets. For example (AS:32) refers to *L'Archéologie du savoir*, p.32.

All translations are my own except where otherwise stated. Except in a few cases, I have generally consulted only the original French versions of Foucault's work.