

ESSENTIAL WORKS OF  
FOUCAULT,  
1954-1984

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SERIES EDITOR

*Ethics*

edited by Paul Rabinow

*Aesthetics, Method, and Epistemology*  
edited by James D. Faubion

MICHEL FOUCAULT

AESTHETICS,  
METHOD,  
AND  
EPISTEMOLOGY

*Edited by*

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*Translated by*

ROBERT HURLEY AND OTHERS

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FOUCAULT

1954-1984

VOLUME TWO

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FOUCAULT

*Maurice Florence\**

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*T*o the extent that Foucault fits into the philosophical tradition, it is the critical tradition of Kant, and his project could be called a *Critical History of Thought*.<sup>1</sup> This should not be taken to mean a history of ideas that would be at the same time an analysis of errors that might be gauged after the fact; or a decipherment of the misinterpretations linked to them and on which what we think today might depend. If what is meant by thought is the act that posits a subject and an object, along with their various possible relations, a critical history of thought would be an analysis of the conditions under which certain relations of subject to object are formed or modified, insofar as those relations constitute a possible knowledge [*savoir*]. It is not a matter of defining the formal conditions of a relationship to the object; nor is it a matter of isolating the empirical conditions that may, at a given moment, have enabled the subject in general to become acquainted with an object already given in reality. The problem is to determine what the subject must be, to what condition he is subject, what status he must have, what position he must occupy in reality or in the imaginary, in order to become a legitimate subject of this or that type of knowledge [*connaissance*]. In short, it is a matter of determining its mode of "subjectivation," for the latter is obviously not the same, ac-

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\*In the early eighties, Denis Huisman asked François Ewald, Foucault's assistant at the Collège de France, to reedit the entry on Foucault for a new edition of the *Dictionnaire des philosophes*. The text submitted to Huisman was written almost entirely by Foucault himself, and signed pseudonymously "Maurice Florence." Robert Hurley's translation.

cording to whether the knowledge involved has the form of an exegesis of a sacred text, a natural history observation, or the analysis of a mental patient's behavior. But it is also and at the same time a question of determining under what conditions something can become an object for a possible knowledge [*connaissance*], how it may have been problematized as an object to be known, to what selective procedure [*procédure de découpage*] it may have been subjected, the part of it that is regarded as pertinent. So it is a matter of determining its mode of objectivation, which is not the same either, depending on the type of knowledge [*savoir*] that is involved.

This objectivation and this subjectivation are not independent of each other. From their mutual development and their interconnection, what could be called the "games of truth" come into being—that is, not the discovery of true things but the rules according to which what a subject can say about certain things depends on the question of true and false. In sum, the critical history of thought is neither a history of acquisitions nor a history of concealments of truth; it is the history of "veridictions," understood as the forms according to which discourses capable of being declared true or false are articulated concerning a domain of things. What the conditions of this emergence were, the price that was paid for it, so to speak, its effects on reality and the way in which, linking a certain type of object to certain modalities of the subject, it constituted the historical a priori of a possible experience for a period of time, an area and for given individuals.

Now, Michel Foucault did not pose this question—or this series of questions, which are those of an "archaeology of knowledge"—and does not wish to pose it concerning just any game of truth, but concerning only those in which the subject himself is posited as an object of possible knowledge: What are the processes of subjectivation and objectivation that make it possible for the subject qua subject to become an object of knowledge [*connaissance*], as a subject? Of course, it is a matter not of ascertaining how a "psychological knowledge" was constituted in the course of history but of discovering how various truth games were formed through which the subject became an object of knowledge. Michel Foucault attempted to conduct his analysis in two ways. First, in connection with the appearance and insertion of the question of the speaking, laboring, and living subject, in domains and according to the form of a scientific type of knowledge. This had to do with the formation of certain "human sciences," stud-



ied in reference to the practice of the empirical sciences, and of their characteristic discourse in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries (*The Order of Things*). Foucault also tried to analyze the formation of the subject as he may appear on the other side of a normative division, becoming an object of knowledge—as a madman, a patient, or a delinquent, through practices such as those of psychiatry, clinical medicine, and penalty (*Madness and Civilization, Birth of the Clinic, Discipline and Punish*).

Foucault has now undertaken, still within the same general project, to study the constitution of the subject as an object for himself: the formation of procedures by which the subject is led to observe himself, analyze himself, interpret himself, recognize himself as a domain of possible knowledge. In short, this concerns the history of “subjectivity,” if what is meant by the term is the way in which the subject experiences himself in a game of truth where he relates to himself. The question of sex and sexuality appeared, in Foucault’s view, to constitute not the only possible example, certainly, but at least a rather privileged case. Indeed, it was in this connection that through the whole of Christianity, and perhaps beyond, individuals were all called on to recognize themselves as subjects of pleasure, of desire, of lust, of temptation and were urged to deploy, by various means (self-examination, spiritual exercises, admission, confession), the game of true and false in regard to themselves and what constitutes the most secret, the most individual part of their subjectivity.

In sum, this history of sexuality is meant to constitute a third segment, added to the analyses of relations between the subject and truth or, to be exact, to the study of the modes according to which the subject was able to be inserted as an object in the games of truth.

Taking the question of relations between the subject and truth as the guiding thread for all these analyses implies certain choices of method. And, first, a systematic skepticism toward all anthropological universals—which does not mean rejecting them all from the start, outright and once and for all, but that nothing of that order must be accepted that is not strictly indispensable. In regard to human nature or the categories that may be applied to the subject, everything in our knowledge which is suggested to us as being universally valid must be tested and analyzed. Refusing the universal of “madness,” “delinquency,” or “sexuality” does not imply that what these notions refer to is nothing, or that they are only chimeras invented for the sake of a

dubious cause. Something more is involved, however, than the simple observation that their content varies with time and circumstances: It means that one must investigate the conditions that enable people, according to the rules of true and false statements, to recognize a subject as mentally ill or to arrange that a subject recognize the most essential part of himself in the modality of his sexual desire. So the first rule of method for this kind of work is this: Insofar as possible, circumvent the anthropological universals (and, of course, those of a humanism that would assert the rights, the privileges, and the nature of a human being as an immediate and timeless truth of the subject) in order to examine them as historical constructs. One must also reverse the philosophical way of proceeding upward to the constituent subject which is asked to account for every possible object of knowledge in general. On the contrary, it is a matter of proceeding back down to the study of the concrete practices by which the subject is constituted in the immanence of a domain of knowledge. There too, one must be careful: Refusing the philosophical recourse to a constituent subject does not amount to acting as if the subject did not exist, making an abstraction of it on behalf of a pure objectivity. This refusal has the aim of eliciting the processes that are peculiar to an experience in which the subject and the object "are formed and transformed" in relation to and in terms of one another. The discourses of mental illness, delinquency, or sexuality say what the subject is only in a certain, quite particular game of truth; but these games are not imposed on the subject from the outside according to a necessary causality or structural determination. They open up a field of experience in which the subject and the object are both constituted only under certain simultaneous conditions, but in which they are constantly modified in relation to each other, and so they modify this field of experience itself.

Hence a third principle of method: Address "practices" as a domain of analysis, approach the study from the angle of what "was done." For example, what was done with madmen, delinquents, or sick people? On course, one can try to infer the institutions in which they were placed and the treatments to which they were subjected from the ideas that people had about them, or knowledge that people believed they had about them. One can also look for the form of "true" mental illnesses and the modalities of real delinquency in a given period in order to explain what was thought about them at the time.

Michel Foucault approaches things in an altogether different way. He first studies the ensemble of more or less regulated, more or less deliberate, more or less finalized ways of doing things, through which can be seen both what was constituted as real for those who sought to think it and manage it and the way in which the latter constituted themselves as subjects capable of knowing, analyzing, and ultimately altering reality. These are the "practices," understood as a way of acting and thinking at once, that provide the intelligibility key for the correlative constitution of the subject and the object.

Now, since it is a matter of studying the different modes of objectivation of the subject that appear through these practices, one understands how important it is to analyze power relations. But it is essential to clearly define what such an analysis can be and can hope to accomplish. Obviously, it is a matter not of examining "power" with regard to its origin, its principles, or its legitimate limits, but of studying the methods and techniques used in different institutional contexts to act upon the behavior of individuals taken separately or in a group, so as to shape, direct, modify their way of conducting themselves, to impose ends on their inaction or fit it into overall strategies, these being multiple consequently, in their form and their place of exercise; diverse, too, in the procedures and techniques they bring into play. These power relations characterize the manner in which men are "governed" by one another; and their analysis shows how, through certain forms of "government," of madmen, sick people, criminals, and so on, the mad, the sick, the delinquent subject is objectified. So an analysis of this kind implies not that the abuse of this or that power has created madmen, sick people, or criminals, there where there was nothing, but that the various and particular forms of "government" of individuals were determinant in the different modes of objectivation of the subject.

One sees how the theme of a "history of sexuality" can fit within Michel Foucault's general project. It is a matter of analyzing "sexuality" as a historically singular mode of experience in which the subject is objectified for himself and for others through certain specific procedures of "government."

#### NOTES

- 1 The italicized phrase is by François Ewald, who wrote the first part of this statement. — Ed.