

## FOUCAULT AND ANTIQUITY

MILLER (P. A.) *Foucault's Seminars on Antiquity. Learning to Speak the Truth*. Pp. xiv + 218. London and New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2022. Cased, £70, US\$95. ISBN: 978-1-4742-7866-9.  
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M.'s work is an important contribution to academic engagement with the philosophically rich content of Foucault's late seminar series. M. directs readers through the late seminars and provides critical analysis of the main issues. However, this presents the initial problem with the work, the scope is too ambitious to provide concise analysis of the four seminars he has chosen to discuss. The consequence of the volume of content that M. attempts to cover leads to certain discussions appearing not sufficiently fleshed out. For example, M.'s presentation of Foucault's understanding of Euripides' play *Ion* lacks the analysis one would expect from a piece of content to which Foucault dedicates a significant proportion of examination. Thus, despite M.'s ability to identify Foucault's key questions, he does not often engage with them in a way that advances Foucault's position.

M. conducts his analysis by chronologically working through Foucault's lecture series, from 'The Government of Living' (1979–80) through to 'The Courage of Truth' (1983–4). Perhaps such an analysis would not be so obvious a problem if Foucault's lecture series followed a systematic and clearly defined path, but they do not. Indeed, Foucault's analysis is often contradictory and unsystematic, which is undoubtedly a consequence of his intellectual probing and questioning that occurs during these seminars, as M. admits: 'The lectures have the feel of work in progress' (p. 123). This is of course correct because the lectures are immature in that Foucault was continually developing the ideas present in these series, yet this detail is not expanded upon further. Furthermore, although Foucault begins the lecture series asking certain questions, over the course of the lectures he often deviates from his primary objectives into other areas not directly relevant to the initial task he set out. Perhaps the most obvious example of this, although admittedly not covered by M., is the lecture series entitled 'The Birth of Biopolitics' that Foucault gave at the Collège de France in 1978–9, where Foucault never seriously discusses biopolitics. Therefore, presenting Foucault's series as a systematic analysis of ideas does not feel authentic to the reality of how Foucault conducted his lectures. It would have been useful for M. to express these concerns in the introduction, so that readers do not come to the misunderstanding that Foucault presented analysis structured more systematically than it is.

Nevertheless, M.'s work raises a series of philosophical issues that Foucault was interested in towards the end of his life. Specifically, the two issues of 'truth telling' and 'care of self' are clearly important to Foucault and are topics of contemporary significance. M.'s research is most successful in the discussion of Foucault's ideas of 'care of self', and it is here that M.'s contribution to knowledge is clear. I suggest this because, whereas Foucault's move towards engaging with the truth is somewhat exploratory, his interest in the 'care of self' is more of a continuation of previous analyses and investigations. In particular, Chapter 3, 'Hermeneutics of the Subject: Spirituality, *Parrhēsia*, and Truth', is an enlightening analysis of Foucault's 'care of self' and has M. question Foucault using the work of Pierre Hadot. M. discusses Hadot's concern with Foucault's understanding of the Stoic care of the self, but this kind of engagement is not present throughout the work. The implementation of additional scholarly discussion like M.'s discussion of Hadot would have added to the analysis. The success of this chapter exposes the weaknesses of the other chapters to question critically Foucault's ideas, which could have been mitigated

if M. had clarified that Foucault's ideas were unfinished and in their early conception. M. takes the various notions of 'care of self' from Foucault's lectures to elucidate the idea that Foucault believed that knowledge and truth are things that we do, and not objects that exist prior to discourse. The active nature of humans to develop their own truths and knowledge comes across as one of the fundamental aims Foucault hoped to convey to his listeners.

M.'s discussion of truth-telling and *parrhēsia* is less successful owing to the attempts to solidify and define concepts that Foucault was continuously unpacking throughout his late works. Although the analysis presented is often an accurate account of what Foucault argued in his seminars, there is no specific recognition of the changing nature of Foucault's understanding and terminology. M. does hint at the metamorphosis of Foucault's thought, but it is not made explicit to readers. Furthermore, M. presents Foucault's ideas as if they are accurate interpretations of the source material, stating in one case that Cynic philosophy expert M.-O. Goulet-Cazé appreciates Foucault's representation of the Cynics (p. 178). However, M. fails to address in any serious depth alternative interpretations provided by other scholars, which is a problem experienced throughout and no doubt stems from the ambition of the scope. Additionally, Foucault never fully works out the issue of rhetoric in his lecture series, which is why M. is unable to provide a fully fleshed account of Foucault's understanding of rhetoric in relation to *parrhēsia*, but M. does not identify that this is the case. Thus, the final chapter is an insightful account of Foucault's understanding of *parrhēsia* and the Cynics, which provides readers with knowledge that has previously been underdeveloped; yet it could have been improved if M. had mentioned that Foucault had only just begun his investigations into *parrhēsia*.

Finally, it must also be considered that Foucault suffered from illness in the final years of his life and did not want any posthumous publication of his work (except for explicitly authorised content); and although I do not disagree with analysis of the now posthumously published works, it is worth mentioning this contextual fact because Foucault expressed doubts about his lecture series. The publication of the lecture series has been justified by the editors under the premise that Foucault gave consent for his students to record him, but it remains important to mention this fact owing to the possibility that Foucault did not believe his prototype thoughts and ideas should have been made readily available. Of course, Foucault's lack of authorisation of these lecture series does not make them any less insightful, but it does mean that they should be approached differently to his other works.

The success of M.'s work is that it interacts with ideas found with Foucault's late lecture series that have remained on the fringes of English-speaking academia. The ideas raised in Foucault's late lecture series are truly enlightening and worthy of further research. Although I have criticised M. and Foucault for the lack of clarity in the ideas raised in the seminar series, this is a necessary result of the ambitious scope and the nature of preliminary research. Thus, M. presents what I view as a springboard from which those interested in the ideas of the late Foucault can identify and proceed further with critical analysis.

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