

MARITA RAINSBOROUGH, *FOUCAULT HEUTE. NEUE PERSPEKTIVEN IN PHILOSOPHIE UND KULTURWISSENSCHAFT. DAS SUBJEKT ZWISCHEN WISSEN, MACHT, ETHIK UND ÄSTHETIK*, BIELEFELD: TRANSCRIPT VERLAG, 2018, 243 P.

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This new book by Marita Rainsboroug is structured according to 4 sections. The first, an Introduction, presents a general view of the core themes and the aim of the text. The second section constitutes the substantial body of the work, under the general title “Foucault Heute. Das Subjekt im Kontext von Wissen, Macht, Ethik und Ästhetik“, and is subdivided into 3 subsections: “2.1 – Perspektivierungen und Neuentwürfe. Foucault, Kant, Hegel, Bloch und Mbembe im Dialog” -, with 6 chapters; “2.2 – Zwischen Autonomie und Heteronomie. Subjekt, Ethik und Ästhetik bei Michel Foucault”, with 5 chapters; “2.3 – Subjekt und Macht. Foucaults Konzept von Macht und Widerstand im globalen Kontext”, with 3 chapters. The third section is a “Resümee”, as a general retrospective conclusion to the whole work; and section 4 constitutes a wide and very appropriate and updated “Literaturverzeichnis”.

Obviously, within the limits of a review, it is impossible to give an account, even summarily, of all the topics discussed and of all the relevant speculative content of the very dense 14 chapters that constitute the substance of this work. However, the mere mention of their titles already conveys an idea of the great interest, pertinence and breadth of the themes discussed, while revealing something of the novelty and originality of the perspective that inspires the respective treatment. Since the Introduction, the Author states the main focus of her book, explaining the general purpose that presides over the text, which is a “revisitation” of Foucault’s work that can provide an overall view of his philosophy and illuminate the roots and

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the main theorems of his thought, in dialogue or critical confrontation with the philosophers, whether contemporary or Ancient, who inspired him; from what becomes possible to evaluate Foucault's philosophical ideas and theses, also in the light of the criticism from some more recent trends in Philosophy and Cultural Studies, such as New Realism, Post-Humanism, Post-colonial and De-colonial thinking, and thus to recognize the persistent and provocative relevance of his philosophical concept today. Marita believes that by interrelating all parts of Foucault's philosophy it is possible to access a much more comprehensive interpretation of his thought. In this sense she proposes, at first, to carry out a review and a wide discussion of the main references and sources of Foucault's thought especially in German philosophy, with emphasis on his Kantian heritage, but also on his debt to Hegel and Bloch, aspects that she considers to have been insufficiently approached in the existing literature, but which are of special relevance for a better understanding and evaluation of his philosophy. This whole core of issues is subtly treated, with accuracy and originality, through comparative hermeneutics, in the 6 chapters of subsection 2.1, about which I will say something more below.

There is another important theme emphasized since the Introduction, which pervades all the different subsections of the central section of the work and is also in debate, explicitly or implicitly, in all its chapters: the question of the Subject (or Self). This theme, despite the often proclaimed "death of the Subject", has a resilient and broad presence in the thought of the author of *L'herméneutique du sujet*, who once wrote that "it is the subject that constitutes the general theme of my investigations" («Le sujet et le pouvoir» <1982>, *Dits et écrits*, II:1042), and elsewhere, that: «The collapse of philosophical subjectivity, its dispersion within a language that deposes it but multiplies it in the space of its gap is probably one of the fundamental structures of contemporary thought.» («Préface à la transgression», *Dits et écrits*, I: 270). As if she had these statements in mind, Marita incisively draws the topography of the peculiar dissemination of the Subject in Foucault's discursive practice, especially in his several lectures and late (or posthumous) writings on political philosophy related to the macrophysics and microphysics of power, the self-and others' government, on the Ethics of self-care and the technologies of the Self, on the art of living as practice of freedom, finally, on the Aesthetics of existence (the bio-aesthetics as play-aesthetics). According to the Author, who also develops in her text a very complete and insightful topographic hermeneutics of the Subject in Foucault's work, Kant was also decisive for the constitution of this Foucauldian theme, namely through his concept of autonomy, imported from the political to the ethical sphere with all the other correlated concepts (Autonomy, Freedom, Enlightenment, Critics, Emancipation, Revolution, Resistance). Nevertheless, in Foucault's philosophy, the theme takes a new form, detaching itself from Kantian ethical universalism, in order to gain meaning in the context of individual self-formation and historical-social transformation, where Foucault's peculiar concept of Power goes hand in hand with Ethics and Aesthetics, the self-formation of the Self being understood as an individual emancipatory process in the unending tension between autonomy and heteronomy. Like Kant, Foucault founds autonomy and freedom upon Ethics, but he understands them in a predominantly aesthetic sense, which does not allow for any universal principle. Surely, the Foucauldian conception of the autonomy of the Subject undergoes an aesthetic turn, no longer inspired by Kant, but perhaps rather by Nietzsche, and in the last stage

of his life the French philosopher increasingly explains his idea of an Ethics-Aesthetics of the Self in privileged dialogue with ancient Stoic philosophers. All the chapters of subsections 2.2 (“Subjekt, Ethik und Ästhetik bei M. Foucault”) and 2.3 (“Subjekt und Macht”) are devoted to the intense discussion of these very important questions, either through a careful exegesis and personal interpretation of Foucault’s writings, or also in confrontation with other thinkers, namely with G. W. F. Hegel’s Aesthetics and Judith Butler’s theory of the economy of emotions.

Related to the topic of the Subject or the Self, Rainsborough’s book is pervaded by the question about the relevance of Foucault’s philosophy today, a relevance that is considered both for its ability to raise new perspectives that could illuminate important philosophical problems, as well as for provoking criticisms that point out the limitations and ambiguities of its own theses and approaches. Recent criticism of some Foucauldian theses is related especially with his political philosophy, namely, with his concepts of Power and Resistance. The Author shows the relevance of Foucault as a promoter of critical dialogue also in these new trends of thought, something which the literature on the French philosopher seldom recognizes and even less ascribes importance. She believes that, with Foucault, by reading, reinterpreting and criticizing Foucault, one can go beyond Foucault. As such, in the 3 chapters of the last subsection (2.3) of section 2, Marita gives voice to the criticisms of Byung Chyul Hans, Achille Mbembe, Walter Dignolo and Homi Bhabha, which, from the perspective of a way of thinking that intends to be post-colonial or even decolonized, sometimes also in critical dialogue with Kant’s views on cosmopolitanism, point out the limits of Foucault’s concepts of Power, Resistance and Critique, and his inability to propose a truly decolonized cosmopolitanism, given the medullary eurocentrism that affects his (and even Kant’s) political philosophy. Even so, the Author warns to the need to consider and understand the multiple levels of Foucault’s concept of Power, which are generally not taken into account by those who criticise it; and, thus, she concludes that the ability of Foucault’s writings to arouse criticism and alternative ways of thinking is an unmistakable proof of its persistent relevance and also an evidence that, in the order of thinking and discursive production - as the French philosopher practiced it himself -, progress is made not with the aim to reach universal agreement in a single discourse or final winning theory, but rather through the resistance of the selves to uniformity, through the exercise of self-experiencing and self-producing new perspectives of thinking; in short, through the emergence of discursive alternatives and heterotopias.

Now, I intend to further point out the Author’s relevant contribution in tracing the “genealogy” of Foucault’s “archaeology”, that is, in making the inventory of the “roots” or “sources” of his philosophy, namely in the tradition of Kant’s philosophy. Since his complementary thesis on Kant’s *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View*, to the latest Lectures on the essay “An answer to the Question: What Is Enlightenment?», Foucault maintained an increasingly intense dialogue with Kant’s writings. His reiterated acknowledgement of his debt to the author of the *Critique of Pure Reason* and even his explicit auto-inscription in the “tradition of critical philosophy” inaugurated by Kant, seeing his personal contribution to that tradition in the project of carrying out a “critical history of thought”, are both well-known. Foucault’s “debt” to Kant is a theme often discussed with more or less extension in the literature devoted to him. Marita also undertakes an important and innovative review of this issue and tries to

better understand the effective Kantian inheritance in Foucault's philosophy. In the subsection 2.1 of her work, she carries out an inventory of the Kantian roots of Foucault's philosophy through a comparative hermeneutical strategy, focused on topics especially relevant to both philosophers. She identifies six themes, most of them in correlation with the others: Critics: Limits and Transgression; the concept of A priori; the relation between Freedom, Nature and History; the conception of History: from Utopia to Heterotopia; Hope, Future and Possibility; Critics, Power and Progress. In the last three themes, which deal mainly with the relationship between Philosophy of History and Political Philosophy, the dialogue becomes triangular, respectively, between Foucault-Kant-Hegel, Kant-Foucault-Bloch, Kant-Foucault-Mbembe. It must be said that the interpretation proposed by the Author illuminates both Foucault's philosophy and that of other philosophers involved. In general, she shows how Kantian philosophical topics are considered by Foucault not exactly as a subject for academic exegesis or hermeneutics, but as a "theme" that inspires and provokes "variations", undergoing profound transformation, suffering displacement from the original context to a new context, which gives them a completely new meaning and function. That is, they are displaced from the Kantian "Transcendental philosophy" to Foucault's philosophical "Archaeology". Sometimes, despite all the seductive subtlety of the French philosopher, what results from this process is the narrowing or impoverishment of the original theme, but almost always what remains is the air of a vague resemblance.

We have already seen how a similar process occurred with the concept of Subject. But let us take, as a new example of this, the concept of the a priori. In ch.2.1.2. of her book, Marita exposes the Foucauldian "variation" on this very peculiar Kantian "theme". After characterizing the meaning of the a priori in Kant, and explaining the broad functions that the German philosopher attributes to this concept in the context of his transcendental philosophy, namely, in the theoretical-cognitive, the practical-moral and the aesthetic-teleological spheres, as the proper foundation of the universality of judgements and so also of common rational mankind, Marita shows the displacement and the profound transformation that this notion undergoes within the scope of Foucault's "archaeology", where it appears as "historical a priori", and she rather stresses the structural and functional proximity between the Foucauldian notion of "historical a priori" and the Kuhnian notions of "paradigm" and "paradigm shift". With his new notion, by limiting a priori knowledge, in the sense of formal knowledge, to the field of mathematics and logic as the condition for valid judgements, and subordinating this field to the historical a priori, which provides the conditions under which formal structures such as mathematical formulae may occur in specific historical situations in accordance with the rules of discursive practice, the philosopher-"archaeologist" sustains that the presumptions of reality and validity for knowledge are subjected to certain historical conditions. Though recognizing the epistemic value of the new Foucauldian notion of "historical a priori", Marita emphasizes the narrowing that underwent Kant's notion of a priori and pertinently asks if Foucault does indeed succeed in interpreting and refuting the wide-ranging Kantian notion by means of his new formulation, and even if he is able to overcome the theoretical implications of the Kantian notion, which, by characterizing human cognitive, moral and aesthetic faculties as transcending time and the mere sensible world, is correlated with an anthropological

conception that refers to the supra-sensible world and even to a practical-moral metaphysics. In a comparative assessment of the two concepts of a priori, the Author notes that, in contrast with Kant's a priori, which equally concerns the concept of the subject, the scientific and metaphysical knowledge, ethics, aesthetics and socio-historical in general, the Foucauldian concept of historical a priori is limited to the theory of knowledge in general, to cognition and to the process related to the formation of the subject. The French philosopher, having not paid enough attention to the breadth, meaning and functions of Kantian a priori, also did not know how to take advantage of the lessons that could come from it. Confronted with Kant's transcendental a priori in all its breadth of meaning and spheres of application, Foucault's historical a priori shows itself in the obvious pragmatic reduction of its scope and function. The apriority that results from Foucault's proposal is, ultimately, the paradigmatic consolidation of a given situation of experience. It is, therefore, an apriority in a posteriority.

Another topic that tests the nearness or displacement between Foucault's and Kant's philosophies is their respective understanding of the correlation of three very semantical dense notions: Freedom, History and Nature. According to the Author, while Kant views Nature as being anchored in the historical process, the historical process only being possible in the combination of human Freedom with the teleology of Nature, which guides the historical realization of the destination of human species and is the real guarantee of this final fulfilment in the idea of a cosmopolitan political constitution as the condition for a perpetual peace (and so for the complete development of all the natural dispositions in the human species), in Foucault's philosophy Nature has no central position and role. For the French philosopher, History rather undergoes a process of detachment from Nature, and is seemingly transformed into a series of random events without any presumed "hidden plan", be it from Nature or from another instance. While, on the other hand, he also views History as representing a human task whose concern is to shape the world, the social community and the self, a process which certainly presupposes human Freedom, however, this is not understood, as in Kant's work, as the autonomy of the universal self-legislation of human practical reason and moral and political improvement within the scope of the historical process involving the whole human species, but rather in the sense of individual self-forming, as an ethico-poetical stance which is equated with self-liberation from power contexts. In fact, Foucault's philosophy has a general deficit of Nature, which is only somewhat compensated by a material conception of Culture. Thus, Marita concludes, in the case of Foucault's philosophy, it is possible to speak not only of the "death of the Human" and of the "death of the Subject", but also of the "death of Nature", since the philosopher-"archaeologist" completely ignores the role and "agency" of Nature in the historical process, as some critics, like Karen Barad, have already justly pointed out. Nevertheless, in Foucault's tendency to materialize all the cultural sphere, the Author sees a possible bridge back to Nature, but she recognizes that the French philosopher was not able to follow this path himself.

Finally, in this very brief sample, I would like to highlight another very original topic in Marita Rainsborough's book, which constitutes the first chapter of section 2.1, entitled «Limit and transgression. Michel Foucault's critical analysis of Kant in terms of philosophical metaphors». It is an exemplary exercise in comparative hermeneutics based on the metaphors

that shape and guide thought, even that of the greatest philosophers. In both Kant and Foucault, the metaphors of limits (*Grenze*) and transgression (*Überschreitung*) are dominant. But while the critical philosopher places the emphasis on the Critique of Reason as a proper “discipline of limits” and on the consequent finitude of reason and of man himself, the French philosopher is moved by the pathos of transgressing all limits imposed by systems of governance, repression and coercion, whether on the social bodies or on the individual bodies and their respective drive mechanisms of expression, whether they are related to sexuality, to emotions, or to life projects. Both philosophers recognize the relationship between Freedom and Criticism, but in Kant it is the Critical Reason, which, using the freedom it claims for itself, in the name of that same freedom, limits and contains itself, in the same gesture in which it emancipates itself from the forms of dogmatic thinking and despotic government, daring to think for itself and to act for itself. Following the guiding thread of the two metaphors and respective modulations in the works of the two philosophers, Marita reaches surprising conclusions: with his preference for drawing borders, Kant appears humble, disciplinary and strict; Foucault, in contrast, is almost erotic, playful, imaginative and excessive. Certainly, there is also modesty, limitation and restriction in Foucault’s thinking, but in a quite different sense. It can be found in the modest, careful work of his historically situated projects, the occasionally successful stylization of ways of life. Kant, on the other hand, dares to go beyond the mere limits of experience, or sensibility, or phenomena, by postulating, as transcendental presuppositions, an intelligible world, the noumena, a teleological principle of Nature, which serves not for knowing but for reflective thinking, and so is the basis of the overall project Man, Mankind, Confederation of Nations, World Peace. This “utopian” trait of Kant’s philosophy appears as unexpected and seems to be completely incomprehensible, insofar as it goes against the explicit intentionality of his philosophy. In truth, however it is actually Kant himself who crosses the borders. It is he the philosopher of the “limits of reason”, who leaves a horizon of meaning open to human History. And so, the third philosophical question he asked – “What am I allowed to expect?” – was not totally unanswered. In the three last chapters of the same subsection, the Author explains and discusses with more detail the different views of both philosophers (and also of Hegel and Bloch) concerning the philosophical topics related to the historical condition of Mankind - namely, Progress, Future, Hope -, and points out the transformation of Kantian historical Utopia in Foucault’s Heterotopia.

In short, in this book, Marita Rainsborough offers a wide-ranging new interpretation of Foucault’s philosophy, supported by the use of the complete textual corpus of the philosopher, including his posthumously published writings. Throughout her text, she broadly demonstrates a profound and very subtle hermeneutic capacity, a remarkable speculative insight to understand the theses and critical ability to discuss the arguments of Foucault and of other philosophers or thinkers and critics in some way related to him, and all this with great originality in addressing and clarity in explaining the philosophical problems she deals with.

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