

Reading Practices - How to read Foucault?

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Review of: Daniel Zamora and Michael C. Behrent (2016), *Foucault and Neoliberalism*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 152 pages; and Mitchel Dean and Kaspar Villadsen (2016), *State Phobia and Civil Society. The Political Legacy of Michel Foucault*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 196 pages.

Does Foucault have sympathies for neoliberalism? Is his analysis of it therefore rather an “apology” (Becker, Ewald and Harcourt 2012: 4) than a critique? Is his theoretical and political antistatist complicit in the neoliberal dismantling of the welfare state? Such are the questions that have sparked a lively discussion in the last year, mostly on various web blogs¹ but also in journals (Hansen 2015) – and in books, as the two under review here.

Set off by Daniel Zamora’s interview with the strange title “Can We Criticize Foucault?” in the journal *Ballast* (an English translation appeared in *Jacobin*),² the bold and sweeping accusations that not only had Foucault himself been at least uncritical, if not supportive of neoliberalism, but also that “Foucault scholasticism” (Behrent 2016 [2014]: 54) is therefore implicated in the neoliberal strategy and that this constitutes Foucault’s “political legacy”, (Dean and Villadsen 2016) seem to have touched a sensitive spot within current Foucaultian scholarship. Although Johanna Oksala (2015) is fundamentally right in her assessment that “this debate itself seems misguided,”³ there is something to learn from this misguided debate because it brings

out two questions mostly left unattended by all its participants (but see Erlenbusch 2015): How do *we* read Foucault? And how does *Foucault* read (neoliberals like Gary Becker, for example)? By way of reviewing first the English edition of Daniel Zamora’s *Critiquer Foucault* (2014), and second Mitchell Dean’s and Kaspar Villadsen’s monograph *State Phobia and Civil Society* (2016), I will argue that the questions of how we read Foucault and how Foucault reads are not sufficiently addressed.

I.

Foucault and Neoliberalism (Zamora and Behrent 2016 [2014]) consists of eight texts, most of which have been published elsewhere before.⁴ In his short introduction, Daniel Zamora frames the volume by turning Foucault into an exemplary figure: Although he was (and is?) notoriously hard to pin down politically and although he “always seemed one step ahead of his contemporaries” (2), his positions and the questions we should ask of them “pertain not only to Foucault himself, but also to the ambiguities inherent in the Left” (3). Thus, it would be “the wrong question” to ask “whether Foucault became neoliberal at the end of his life” (5); instead, Zamora’s aim is to understand and criticise what he takes to be his influence and the issues he forcefully put on the agenda of the Left. The right questions to ask include the following:

“How should we interpret Foucault’s radical position on social security, which he essentially saw as the culmination of ‘biopower’? Or his support [...] of the ‘new philosophers’? How should we view his lectures on *The Birth of Biopolitics* and his presumed sympathy for the engaging and very social-liberal ‘Second Left’? One might, finally, question his illusory belief that neoliberal forms of power would be less disciplinary and that prisons would ultimately disappear.” (3)⁵

Zamora takes up the first question in his own contribution. His overall critical diagnosis is that struggles over the redistribution of power and a politics of identity have replaced struggles against exploitation and for equality (70). With the object of

the struggle, the subjects struggling changed as well: “The agent of this resistance no longer has any clear economic basis, but is defined, rather, by the position it occupies in relation to various forms of power.” (67) This is a problem, Zamora holds, because exploitation and inequality were first lost from sight theoretically and then ceased to be political goals. Thus, the neoliberal Right won both economically and ideologically (80).

To demonstrate that Foucault’s thought is complicit with (if not responsible for) this ‘neoliberal’ shift, Zamora refers to Foucault’s critique of “social security as a tool that standardizes conduct and individuals” (69). Although criticising the welfare state already makes him an accomplice of its neoliberal dismantling for Zamora (cf. 73), further proof is not hard to find:

“Without adopting any critical distance from it, Foucault cited [in *The Birth of Biopolitics*; F.V.] a 1976 report published in the *Revue française des affaires sociales*, which maintained that social security raised the cost of labor excessively, and was partly responsible for unemployment.” (73)

This is a fine example of how Zamora reads Foucault: citing means approval.⁶ We could of course note that Foucault presents the report in question as the second side of a discussion on the economic impact of social policies after having equally affirmatively cited Pierre Laroque’s argument that the economic effects of social policies are exclusively positive (Foucault 2008: 198 f.). Yet what is even more important is the word “critical”, for Zamora presupposes that only a normative condemnation could license citing ‘neoliberal texts’ and arguments without oneself becoming neoliberal. So his reading of Foucault is organized by a presupposition of what critique truly is – without discussing why that would be the case and without taking into consideration the huge debate about Foucault’s concept of critique. Following Zamora’s reading practice, one could also argue that Foucault affirms torture – at least we find no critical distancing from the quartering of Damians in *Discipline and Punish*.

Zamora concludes by restating his surprise about “the ‘last’ Foucault’s thinly veiled sympathy for, and minimal criticism of, the emerging neoliberal paradigm” (79) with

which he started in his introduction. There, a second fundamental problem of Zamora’s text becomes apparent when he writes: “Although Foucault cannot be held responsible for events that he did not witness, it seems legitimate to ponder the ‘last Foucault’s’ political implications.” (64) Whereas the second half of the sentence seems trivial, the first half is puzzling: are we responsible for any event that we witness? Behind the awkward formulation lurks the problem of how to think about the “influence” of theories or the power of ideas. Though Zamora seems determined to find and ascribe guilt and responsibility, he never reflects on the apparent need to do so or even on the criteria justifying it, instead resorting to insinuating questions. How we practice the history of ideas, how to connect them to political struggles, how we read (not just) Foucault and what citing and critique mean – these, I think, are the questions Zamora’s text poses – though, unfortunately, without being aware of them.

In his chapter, Michael Scott Christofferson takes up the second question and examines Foucault’s reasons for writing a supportive – even laudatory – review of André Glucksmann’s *The Master Thinkers* in 1977. He finds three: first, Foucault, disappointed by the reception of *La Volonté de Savoir* (Foucault 1976), wanted to exploit Glucksmann’s success in the mass media (11–13). After all, Foucault “had a history of taking philosophico-political stances that seem to be based more on a desire to situate himself within the avant-garde than on sincere conviction” (12), Christofferson claims, citing Foucault’s flirt with Marxist vocabulary after 1970. Second, Foucault had a political reason for supporting Glucksmann because of his “anti-statist attachment to direct democracy, his vehement anti-communism, and his criticism of the Union of the Left” (13). Yet the third and most important reason was, according to Christofferson, Foucault’s inability to analyse communism (17–21). His most sustained attempt to do so can be found in *Society Must Be Defended*, and was, Christofferson argues, an utter failure because it proceeds from Foucault’s analytic concept of biopower without any empirical evidence to support it. Furthermore, on the basis of his analysis, Foucault cannot account for why certain “states decide to kill in massive numbers and are able to do so” (20) while others do not and/or cannot do so – for Foucault cannot even distinguish between “dictatorial and democratic” (20) states.

Christofferson is right, it seems to me, in claiming that Foucault's supportive review of Glucksmann's *The Master Thinkers* can partially be attributed to his contempt for a Marxism that explains away Stalin's massacres as a reading error (cf. Foucault's review, 171 f.). Yet I doubt the psychological reasons Christofferson ascribes to Foucault: his "thirst for recognition in the broader intellectual scene" (12) and his desire to be avant-garde. For a convincing argument it would take much more than a passing reference to his usage of Marxist vocabulary, a topic which has itself sparked a lively debate about Foucault's relation to Marx and Marxism (a good starting point is Balibar 1995) and that Christofferson does not even mention. Finally, Christofferson's third reason fails completely. Christofferson claims that the most important reason for Foucault's support of Glucksmann is the "ambiguities in his [Foucault's] mid-1970s conception of power and its shortcomings in the analysis of twentieth-century communism" (17). Yet in order for them – the ambiguities and shortcomings – to be the reason that drove Foucault to write a supportive review would require Foucault to realize his failure – and the reasons Christofferson offers as to why Foucault's analysis was a failure surely cannot be Foucault's own, as they completely miss the point of what his concept of power is designed to do (certainly not to make normative distinctions between democratic and non-democratic regimes).

Again, the problem lies in reading Foucault: in order to argue that his support for Glucksmann is a result of him realizing that Glucksmann does what he could not do one must be able to explain why Foucault should assess his own concept of power and the resulting analysis of communism as failures; in other words: one would have to provide explanations that are not external to his conception. That does not mean that Christofferson needs to uncritically agree with this conception – but his own normative ideas about what would constitute a successful analysis of twentieth-century communism cannot be reasons for Foucault's support of anything.

What then, finally, about Foucault's analysis of neoliberalism that Zamora already alleges to be a "thinly veiled" affirmation? In his contribution, Michael C. Behrent offers an interpretation in support of Zamora's charge⁷ by reading *The Birth of Biopolitics* as Foucault's "neoliberal moment" (26). He directs a lot of rhetorical energy against mostly unnamed (American) readers of Foucault who are "tone-deaf

to the character of his evolving political commitments" (26), apparently because they neglect the historical and political context in which Foucault developed his analysis of neoliberalism – and because of the "unwillingness of many of his readers to hear what he [Foucault] is saying" (27). Thus one would expect that Behrent intends to show that Foucault was attracted to neoliberalism for methodological reasons by taking into account the historical setting of the lectures (which he indeed sketches: cf. 31–39).

Even more important are the commonalities Behrent's Foucault has with "economic liberalism" (26, 30), namely antihumanism and antistatism.⁸ On the one hand, Foucault's antistatism drove him to appreciate neoliberalism because "liberalism is, for Foucault, both one form of power among others and the form that demonstrates most effectively how little power has to do with law" (48). Liberal thought, in other words, had already cut off the king's head and thereby granted Foucault's wish. His antihumanism, on the other hand, was well served by "the thinness of [economic liberalism's] anthropological claims" (54). Thus we already have, according to Behrent, two good reasons for Foucault's "strategic endorsement of economic liberalism" (53).⁹

For all his emphasis on 'hearing what Foucault really said' in the lectures, Behrent is surprisingly silent about Foucault's methodological remarks and conceptual definitions, as becomes most apparent in his usage of "liberalism". Foucault spends the first three lectures of *The Birth of Biopolitics* explaining his perspective as a history of "veridiction" – a history of how certain domains are made to fall under the distinction between true and false (cf. Foucault 2008: especially 33–37) – and to define liberalism from that perspective by indicating

"three features: veridiction of the market, limitation by the calculation of governmental utility, and [...] the position of Europe as a region of unlimited economic development in relation to a world market. This is what I have called liberalism." (Foucault 2008: 61)

An important corollary is that Foucault is not especially interested in liberalism because it would guarantee more freedom than the disciplinary society, as Behrent

argues (42–44), for freedom “is not a universal which is particularized in time and geography. Freedom is not a white surface with more or less numerous black spaces here and there and from time to time.” (Foucault 2008: 63). Hence, comparing the amount of freedom in a disciplinary and in a liberal society “does not in fact have much sense” (Foucault 2008: 62) – if we really listen to what Foucault said in the lectures.

Behrent’s refusal to engage with Foucault’s methodological perspective also undermines his two reasons for interpreting Foucault as strategically endorsing neoliberalism. On the one hand, “cutting off the king’s head” is an imperative on the theoretical level (Foucault 1978 [1976]: 88 f.) – Foucault is not normatively judging power relations based on how much or how little they rely on laws but claims that we miss what is going on in these power relations if we think of them purely in a juridical framework. On the other hand, Foucault’s antihumanism is not just the quest for freeing ourselves as much as possible from anthropological premises. It is the much more ambitious claim that from the standpoint of an archaeological and genealogical critique, ‘man’ exists as a specific configuration of power-knowledge regimes (such as the disciplines; cf. Foucault 1977 [1975]: 224–228) that have a history and which might disappear some future day (most explicitly in Foucault 2005 [1966]).

Again, and especially in light of Behrent’s insistence on actually listening to what Foucault said, the questions of how we read Foucault and how Foucault reads come centre stage. Yet this gives rise to a more general point: throughout the volume, the authors refuse to engage in any reflection on these crucial questions, simply referring to a sentence or two where it suits their particular aim, without any attention to their conceptual status or their context within the lectures.¹⁰ We need not agree with Foucault’s way of reading (i.e. with his method) but if we do not take it into account in arguing about his conclusions we are destined to get them wrong. A debate about Foucault’s political legacy and its problematic effects for our critical thinking today might indeed be timely, yet this book is primarily a missed opportunity. By consistently refusing to reflect on how Foucault reads and by neglecting to reflect on their own way of reading Foucault, the authors of this collection obstruct further discussion by obscuring rather than criticising Foucault’s analysis of neoliberalism.

II.

Mitchell Dean’s and Kaspar Villadsen’s monograph *State Phobia and Civil Society* (2016) promises precisely to assess *The Political Legacy of Michel Foucault*, as its subtitle reads. In it, the authors argue for three claims:

- (a) State-phobic or antistatist positions lead those who hold them to affirm “civil society” as the locus of emancipatory politics.
- (b) Although Foucault himself showed that “civil society” cannot serve as “the foundation of and source of opposition to the state” (Foucault 2008: 297) because it is a correlate of liberal governmentality, his own analysis falls prey to its “analytical and normative antistatistism” (178).
- (c) It is this “antistatistism” that leads Foucault to support neoliberalism.

Dean and Villadsen start with some scene-setting (chapter 1). They argue first that state phobia is a form of antistatistism which, according to Foucault, unites liberals with the militant left and still presupposes the state as a central concept for their analyses. Hence and secondly, “governmentality” is introduced by Foucault to analyse the state without presupposing it, although for Dean and Villadsen “the question [remains] whether Foucault escaped the antistatistism he had identified” (18). Thirdly, by sketching the political contexts of Foucault’s governmentality lectures, Dean and Villadsen want to support their claim that although Foucault’s “rejection of a theory of the state [...] marked a break with a prevailing Left intellectual problematic” (19) in 1978/9, today such a rejection merely repeats the mainstream agenda of neoliberals. This is an argument repeated throughout the book: any analysis which does not include a pre-given concept of the state (Dean and Villadsen opt for Weber’s concept: cf. 20 f.) must theoretically locate political power in civil society and is politically defenceless against being hijacked by neoliberal antistatist discourse – if it does not outright support neoliberalism.

Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri as well as Nikolas Rose are charged with these accusations in chapter 2 and 3. Although their seemingly radical differences are noted (cf. 23, 33, 43), Dean and Villadsen find commonalities: both approaches share the aim of overcoming the state/civil society dichotomy and both rely in one way or another on a political vitalism inherited from Deleuze (43 f.). Thereby, both Hardt's and Negri's theory of empire and Rose's work on advanced liberalism

“oddly reinvent the traditional privilege given to the inventiveness, creativity, and mobility found not in the ‘rigidities’ of the state and formal political organizations but in the domain of energy, expression, and vitality that lies beyond them, opposes them, or occasionally breaks forth inside them and which they seek to recode, reinscribe, discipline, and organize.” (44)

This is “the classical dream of civil society” (31), whether called “multitude” or “non-conventional communities” (44), and it demonstrates that neither Hardt and Negri nor Rose successfully overcome the dichotomy between state and civil society.

Due to the focus of this review, I will limit myself to the critical remark that these are highly uncharitable readings. Because their concepts of state and civil society are so broad that they essentially coincide with the distinction of constituted versus constituting power, and because Dean and Villadsen take this opposition to be exhaustive, any theory not focussed on constituted power must, according to their logic, rely on “civil society” as constituting power. Yet the interpretive work this theoretical device is supposed to do would have required a careful analysis of it, as well as an argument for why reading Hardt and Negri or Rose through this traditional lens of political theory might be illuminating.

The same argumentative strategy is used in chapter 4 to show that Foucault “was an advocate of a kind of antistate and antiauthoritarian politics located in civil society” (48). In his interviews (48–52), the introduction of *Society Must Be Defended* (52–56) or his talks “What Is Critique?” and “What Is Enlightenment?”, Foucault takes an “anti-institutional and antistatist position” (51). In the well-known sentence from “What Is Critique?” where Foucault defines critique as “the movement by which the subject gives himself the right to question truth on its effects of power and question

power on its discourses of truth” (Foucault 1997 [1978]: 33), for example, Dean and Villadsen discover a Foucault who “does not quite repeat the classic opposition of truth to power but indicates the emergence of a new space from which it becomes possible to speak to and oppose the ways we are governed, an opposition certainly redolent of the theme of civil society against the state” (57).

Well, if civil society is equated with constitutive power, then any opposition against what one construes as constituted power will certainly smell of civil society. Yet this does tell us more about the view of those who read Foucault's text than about the text – which would be fine, if this chapter (or the book) would be intended to defend Dean's and Villadsen's own views and would not present itself as an assessment of the views of others. Still, we can now understand how Dean and Villadsen argue for their first major claim: antistatist approaches must necessarily take a “civil society” perspective because, within their interpretative framework, to be against the state is to be against constituted power, which (*tertium non datur*) means rooting for constitutive power which is in turn to support civil society.

We have also already seen that for the same reason, Foucault himself is said to tend towards supporting civil society. Dean and Villadsen argue for their second claim – that Foucault's analysis, for all its explicit warnings against state phobia, succumbs to “analytical and normative antistatistism” (178) – in two steps: chapters 5–7 are devoted to the question of how Foucault decentres the state and to assess whether this already amounts to taking a civil society perspective. Chapters 8 and 9 finally investigate *The Birth of Biopolitics*, arguably the most important reference point for the debate, because it is in this lecture course that Foucault warns against state phobia and analyses civil society as “the correlate of a technology of [liberal] government” (Foucault 2008: 296) – and it is of course here (and in *Security, Territory, Population*) where Foucault most directly attempts to analyse the state.

In a first step, Dean and Villadsen read Foucault's decentring of the state through his concept of the “dispositif” as elaborated by Gilles Deleuze. This is a surprising interpretative move – the authors rely on Deleuze's reading of Foucault without bothering to “re-establish the precise connections and demarcations between Foucault and Deleuze” (88) because they want instead to “consider what kind of

approach to state governance and institutions emerges from the invigoration of Foucault's concepts by the Deleuzian vitalist epistemology" (88). This approach poses serious problems, since Dean and Villadsen do not only repeatedly judge Foucault's account based on this conflated reading (cf. 88, 103 f., 114–119) but also fault him for political vitalism (cf. 98, 101, 103). This is not to deny that Deleuzian-inspired readings of Foucault are exciting and have been influential, yet without any arguments for why we should concentrate on these interpretations, Dean and Villadsen's conclusion that Foucault's account in itself tends to dissolve the state to such an extent that it can no longer become an object of analysis is a non-starter. Even worse: if they want to argue that Foucault's work exhibits "vitalism as an enduring ontological premise" (116), this should not be argued for by using a Deleuzian reading of Foucault; rather, the task would be to show that alternative interpretations miss important points or must misconstrue Foucault's analysis. Furthermore, in a book about *The Political Legacy of Michel Foucault*, these should certainly not be seen as "concerns [...] of a more limited, biographical interest" (116) for they separate fruitful and critical engagement from zeitgeisty polemics.

Unhindered by such 'subtleties', Dean's and Villadsen's second step consists in assessing whether *The Birth of Biopolitics* offers a corrective to what so far looks like an analysis of the state that "throws the baby of political liberalism and democratic theory out with the statist bathwater" (86). In an interesting twist, relying heavily on Dominique Colas (1997 [1992]), Lisa Hill (2006) and Giorgio Agamben (2011 [2007]), they argue that Foucault's critical diagnosis of "civil society" pays insufficient attention to the theological roots of the concept in Adam Ferguson, Foucault's main source. This matters, Dean and Villadsen argue, for it indicates that Foucault's genealogy of governmentality turns into an eschatological conception of a historical trajectory towards immanence, towards a governmentality based on pure self-governing (138–144) – and thus towards another version of the 'dream' of civil society. In short: "Foucault has negated economic theology only to produce a version of it" (142).

Again, however, Dean's and Villadsen's arguments remain rather unconvincing because, on the one hand, their overall reconstruction of *The Birth of Biopolitics* remains fragmentary and is tied to the insufficiently justified Deleuzian reading of

the previous chapters. On the other hand, while they do offer some good reasons based on alternative historical interpretations e.g. of Ferguson by Lisa Hill (2006), Dean and Villadsen mostly rely on arguments by analogy, such as this one:

"In his suppression of the theological roots of the physiocrats, Rousseau, Smith, and Ferguson, we could ask, has he [Foucault] not given us a typology of power that takes a distinctly Trinitarian form and that, moreover, resembles the three ages of Joachim di Fiore in the twelfth century?" (142)

This amounts to little more than one of those annoying but "harmless enough amusements for historians who refuse to grow up" (Foucault 2010 [1969]: 144) – and it certainly does not add up to an argument.

In this way Dean and Villadsen arrive at their last chapters, convinced they have shown that Foucault's approach is antistatist despite his warnings against the theoretically and politically disastrous effects of "state phobia" and that he embraces a "civil society" perspective despite his analysis of it being deeply implicated in the exercise of power according to (neo)liberal political rationalities. Their final claim, even more ambitious than their first two, is that this antistatistism leads Foucault to an "apologia" of neoliberalism, because his (later) thoughts express an "affinity much more fundamental than [a] limited, politically conditioned, strategic endorsement" (164).

How do Dean and Villadsen argue for this conclusion? Oddly enough, the two main arguments are the exemplary status of François Ewald as a "Foucaultian" and some lines from the discussion between Bernard Harcourt, Gary Becker and (again) François Ewald (152–158). The first argument goes as follows: since Ewald is the editor of Foucault's lectures and the *Dits et Écrits*, he is "the most influential and loyal Foucauldian today" (146). If this exemplary figure endorses neoliberalism (as Ewald does; cf. 152), there must be something in Foucault's thought that allows, if not triggers, this endorsement. The conclusion of the second argument asserts that because Harcourt's attempt of interpreting Foucault as a critic of neoliberalism (cf. Becker, Ewald and Harcourt 2012: 7–10) fails in the eyes of Dean and Villadsen (154) and of Colin Gordon, whom they praise as "the closest English follower of these [the

governmentality] lectures” (155) – though we are neither told what Harcourt’s interpretation of Foucault’s critique is nor why it fails – Becker must be right when he thinks Foucault simply agrees with him.

‘Puzzlement’ surely is too weak a reaction to this ‘argument’; dismay might be more appropriate. Dean and Villadsen neither present Foucault’s analysis of neoliberalism (except in the most abstract and summary of ways: cf. 147–149), nor do they substantively engage with why so many interpreters have judged it to be critical. Their ‘discussion’ of Thomas Lemke’s reading dismisses it without giving any reason other than again citing the discussion between Becker, Ewald and Harcourt. Even worse, the lament that Foucault never explicitly took a normative position against neoliberalism (159) returns us to the problem encountered in Zamora’s contribution to Foucault and Neoliberalism: with it, Dean and Villadsen (just as Zamora) ignore the whole debate about how to understand Foucault’s concept of critique. According to their way of reading Foucault (although this expression suggests something too methodologically self-aware for what actually happens in the book), Discipline and Punish advocates torture as a non-disciplinary sanction, and one might even have to wonder if Foucault’s detailed discussion of all those small disciplinary techniques would not amount, for Dean and Villadsen, to enthusiasm for discipline – after all, we never got any explicit critique from Foucault, did we?

In summary, then, Dean’s and Villadsen’s book suffers (mostly) from the same lack of interest in providing compelling arguments based on a methodologically sound and self-reflective reading of Foucault as do the contributions to Zamora’s and Behrent’s volume. Using Foucault’s warning against “state phobia” as an objection to (some) recent developments in critical (political) theory, and insisting on Foucault’s argument that “civil society” cannot ground criticisms of (any form of) liberalism because it is “absolutely correlative to the form of governmental technology we call liberalism” (Foucault 2008: 297), might raise interesting questions. Yet in order to development them fruitfully, Foucault’s objections and the accounts of politics they are supposed to object to would have to be elaborated in far more detail and with far more serious engagement with the scholarly literature. As it stands, the book is a hasty polemic designed to attract attention in the current debate about Foucault’s stance towards neoliberalism.

As for the debate itself, what should have become apparent is that how we read Foucault and how we take him to read are the two fundamental questions that have to be answered by any contribution that seriously attempts to understand and assess Foucault’s analysis of neoliberalism. This requires, at a minimum, a consideration of the overall methodological architecture of Foucault’s lectures in 1978 and 1979 and to account for his concept of critique (cf. my attempt in Vogelmann 2012). Yet the same standards hold for those who defend Foucault as a critic of neoliberalism: it simply will not do to state, as Stuart Elden does, that “Foucault’s mode of reading texts often makes it look like he is agreeing with arguments, when he is really trying to reconstruct them, to understand their logic, and so on.” (Elden 2015) Without systematically accounting for Foucault’s methodological perspective on which his analyses (e.g. of neoliberalism) rely and without explicating Foucault’s concept of critique with respect to this methodology (cf. Vogelmann 2014: ch. 2, Vogelmann forthcoming), we are back with the tired debating style often found between Habermasian and Foucaultian scholars in the 1980s: demanding critique to be an explicit normative distancing and reciting Foucault’s refusal of that demand. Thankfully, this debate has moved on to a more nuanced and fruitful exchange – and we should reject any debate that returns us to its stale past.

Notes

1] Interesting discussions took place especially in the blog *An und für sich* (see <https://itself.wordpress.com/category/foucault/foucault-and-neoliberalism-event/>) and on Stuart Elden’s blog *Progressive Geographies* (see <http://progressivegeographies.com/2014/12/17/foucault-and-neoliberalism-a-few-thoughts-in-response-to-the-zamora-piece-in-jacobin/>).

2] <http://www.revue-ballast.fr/peut-on-critiquer-foucault/>; the translation was published at <https://www.jacobinmag.com/2014/12/foucault-interview/>.

3] Why? Oksala (2015) gives the following reason: “Whether Foucault had some secret sympathies for neoliberalism might obviously be of some biographical or historical interest, but theoretically the answer to this question would only be relevant if it disqualified his thought as a useful toolbox for the academic left today.” I take it, however, that Zamora, Behrent, Dean, Villadsen et al. argue for

the latter claim.

4] In addition to the French edition the English includes an article by Mitchell Dean, a translation of Foucault's review of André Glucksmann's *The Master Thinkers* and an outro by Michael C. Behrent.

5] For lack of space, I will concentrate on the three texts that most directly address these three questions, leaving aside the contributions by Loïc Wacquant, Jan Rehmann and Jean-Loup Amselle.

6] His argument that Foucault endorses the idea of a "negative tax" (76–79) follows the same logic.

7] I will focus on Behrent's piece since Mitchell Dean's and Kaspar Villadsen's book discussed in section II includes the analysis Dean presents in his chapter.

8] "Yet while context goes a long way in explaining why Foucault lectured on economic liberalism in 1978 and 1979, the sufficient cause lies in his own evolving philosophical position. For the various forms of antistatism emerging in the 1970s resonated in provocative ways with a central plank of his theoretical program: the effort to conceptualize power without reference to the state." (39)

9] Behrent even finds a third reason: Foucault's diagnosis that socialism lacks a political rationality or governmentality; "only by reconciling itself with neoliberalism, he contended, could it [the Left] endow itself with the tools needed to wield power" (54). Behrent here turns Foucault's diagnosis into a claim of necessity, which is precisely not what Foucault is saying in the lecture, as e.g. Colin Gordon (2015) has pointed out.

10] The funniest example is due to Jan Rehmann, who counters Foucault's claim that the shepherd was not used as a guiding figure in Greek and Roman political thought by stating that "stockbreeding (and thereby the figure of the shepherd) was widespread throughout the entire Mediterranean area" (140).

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