




The Foucault Reader: An Introduction to Foucault's Thought

Paul Rabinow (Editor)

[Download now](#)

[Read Online](#) 

The Foucault Reader: An Introduction to Foucault's Thought

Paul Rabinow (Editor)

The Foucault Reader: An Introduction to Foucault's Thought Paul Rabinow (Editor)

Michel Foucault was one of the most influential thinkers in the contemporary world, someone whose work has affected the teaching of half a dozen disciplines ranging from literary criticism to the history of criminology. But of his many books, not one offers a satisfactory introduction to the entire complex body of his work. *The Foucault Reader* was commissioned precisely to serve that purpose.

The *Reader* contains selections from each area of Foucault's work as well as a wealth of previously unpublished writings, including important material written especially for this volume, the preface to the long-awaited second volume of *The History of Sexuality*, and interviews with Foucault himself, in the course of which he discussed his philosophy at first hand and with unprecedented candor.

This philosophy comprises an astonishing intellectual enterprise: a minute and ongoing investigation of the nature of power in society. Foucault's analyses of this power as it manifests itself in society, schools, hospitals, factories, homes, families, and other forms of organized society are brought together in *The Foucault Reader* to create an overview of this theme and of the broad social and political vision that underlies it.

The Foucault Reader: An Introduction to Foucault's Thought Details

Date : Published November 12th 1984 by Vintage (first published 1984)

ISBN : 9780394713403

Author : Paul Rabinow (Editor)

Format : Paperback 390 pages

Genre : Philosophy, Nonfiction, Theory, Sociology, Politics

 [Download The Foucault Reader: An Introduction to Foucault's ...pdf](#)

 [Read Online The Foucault Reader: An Introduction to Foucault' ...pdf](#)

Download and Read Free Online The Foucault Reader: An Introduction to Foucault's Thought Paul Rabinow (Editor)

From Reader Review The Foucault Reader: An Introduction to Foucault's Thought for online ebook

Haythem Bastawy says

I have not read Foucault before and The Foucault Reader has been an excellent introduction for me to the writings of the renowned philosopher. It contains large excerpts and chapters from many of his works, giving an insight into the nature of the work it has been taken from. For me the most relevant and the most interesting section is the one on the Enlightenment and modernity.

Tyler says

"The pain and pleasure of a book is to be an experience" Foucault

Lisa Jahn says

Very interesting look at Power and Discipline.

Foucault's work develops a historical account of the different modes by which, in our culture, human beings are made subjects.

Foucault's interest is to present a genealogical account of the transition from the classical age to modern forms of power. The success of disciplinary power in the seventeenth and eighteenth century stemmed from a transition in methods. Visible acts of violence, such as public executions or torture, were rendered unnecessary with the rise of coercion.

It is a bit dense, certain passages needed to be read more than once.

Matt Sautman says

While I have read many of the works included in this anthology before, I approach rating this anthology for the point of view of someone who has never read Foucault before at all. While there are some texts here that are generally new to me- "What is Enlightenment?," "What is an Author?," and the interviews, there are also plenty of Foucault's other "greatest hits" in this collection like "Panopticism," "Docile Bodies," "The Birth of the Asylum," and "We 'Other Victorians.'" "Rabinow does an excellent job presenting Foucault's work as an intertextual enterprise, and I see plenty of value in using this text to introduce his major ideas.

Jee Koh says

After encountering the critical thought of Nietzsche, I have wondered how to apply it to social and political problems. Foucault shows one way of doing so, through the genealogical analysis of power relations in

society.

From an interview in Power/Knowledge:

The history which bears and determines us has the form of a war rather than that of a language: relations of power, not relations of meaning. History has no "meaning," though it is not to say that it is absurd or incoherent. On the contrary, it is intelligible and should be susceptible to analysis down to the smallest detail--but this in accordance with the intelligibility of struggles, of strategies and tactics....

What makes power hold good, what makes it accepted, is simply the fact that it doesn't only weigh on us as a force that says no, but that it traverses and produces things, it induces pleasure, forms knowledge, produces discourse....

From the essay "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History":

Humanity does not gradually progress from combat to combat until it arrives at universal reciprocity, where the rule of law finally replaces warfare; humanity installs each of its violences in a system of rules and thus proceeds from domination to domination....

From Discipline and Punish:

The perpetual penalty that traverses all points and supervises every instant in the disciplinary institutions compares, differentiates, hierarchizes, homogenizes, excludes. In short, it normalizes....

Traditionally, power was what was seen, what was shown, and what was manifested and, paradoxically, found the principle of its force in the movement by which it deployed that force. Those on whom it was exercised could remain the shade; they received light only from that portion of power that was conceded to them, or from the reflection of it that for a moment they carried. Disciplinary power, on the other hand, is exercised through its invisibility; at the same time it imposes on those whom it subjects a principle of compulsory visibility. In discipline, it is the subjects who have to be seen....

The "Enlightenment," which discovered the liberties, also invented the disciplines....

From an interview with Paul Rabinow, titled "Space, Knowledge and Power":

Liberty is a practice.... The liberty of men is never assured by the institutions and laws that are intended to guarantee them. This is why almost all of these laws and institutions are quite capable of being turned around. Not because they are ambiguous, but simply because "liberty" is what must be exercised.... The guarantee of freedom is freedom....

From The History of Sexuality, Volume I:

This new persecution of the peripheral sexualities entailed an incorporation of perversities and a new specification of individuals. As defined by the ancient civil or canonical codes, sodomy was a category of forbidden acts; their perpetrator was nothing more than the juridical subject of them. The nineteenth-century homosexual became a personage, a past, a case history, and a childhood, in addition to being a type of life, a life form, and a morphology, with an indiscreet anatomy and possibly a mysterious physiology. Nothing that went into his total composition was unaffected by his sexuality. It was everywhere present in him: at the foot of all his actions because it was their insidious and indefinitely active principle; written immodestly on his face and body because it was a secret that always gave itself away. It was consubstantial with him, less a habitual sin than as a singular nature. We must not forget that the psychological, psychiatric, medical category of homosexuality was constituted from the moment it was characterized--Westphal's famous article of 1870 on "contrary sexual sensations" can stand as its date of birth--less by a type of sexual relation than by a certain quality of sexual sensibility, a certain way of inverting the masculine and the feminine in oneself. Homosexuality appeared as one of the forms of sexuality when it was transposed from the practice of sodomy onto a kind of interior androgyny, a hermaphroditism of the soul. The sodomite had been a temporary aberration; the homosexual was now a species....

From Preface to The History of Sexuality, Volume II:

But I reflected that, after all, it was best to sacrifice a definite program to a promising line of approach. I also reminded myself that it would probably not be worth the trouble of making books if they failed to teach the author something he hadn't known before, if they didn't lead to unforeseen places, and if they didn't disperse one toward a strange and new relation with himself. The pain and the pleasure of the book is to be an experience.

From Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics:

No! I'm not looking for an alternative; you can't find the solution of a problem in the solution of another problem raised at another moment by other people. You see, what I want to do is not the history of solutions, and that's the reason why I don't accept the word alternative. I would like to do the genealogy of problems, of problematiques. My point is not that everything is bad, but that everything is dangerous, which is not exactly the same as bad. If everything is dangerous, then we always have something to do. So my position leads not to apathy, but to a hyper- and pessimistic activism....

I think the ethico-political choice we have to make every day is to determine which is the main danger....

There were exercises in order to make one master of oneself. For Epictetus, you had to be able to look at a beautiful girl or a beautiful boy without having any desire for her or him. You have to become completely master of yourself.

Sexual austerity in Greek society was a trend or movement, a philosophical movement coming from very cultivated people in order to give their life much more intensity, much more beauty. In a way, it's the same in the twentieth century when people, in order to get a more beautiful life, tried to get ride of all the sexual repression of their society, of their childhood. Gide in Greece would have been an austere philosopher....

I think that from the theoretical point of view, Sarre avoids the idea of the self as something which is given to us, but through the moral notion of authenticity, he turns back to the idea that we have to be ourselves--to be truly our true self. I think that the only acceptable practical consequence of what Sartre has said is to link his theoretical insight to the practice of creativity--and not of authenticity. From the idea that the self is not given to us, I think that there is only one practical consequence: we have to create ourselves as a work of art....

From an interview with Paul Rabinow in May, 1984, about polemics, politics, and problemizations:

I like discussions, and when I am asked questions, I try to answer them. It's true that I don't like to get involved in polemics. If I open a book and see that the author is accusing an adversary of "infantile leftism," I shut it again right away. That's not my way of doing things. I don't belong to the world of people who do things that way. I insist on this difference as something essential: a whole morality is at stake, the morality that concerns the search for the truth and the relation to the other.

Lynda says

This is a good overview of Foucault's works. What struck me is how much of his work is influenced by the prejudices in his life and his support of marginalized groups. Trained in psychology, he is an example of the scientist whose work has moved into philosophy.

Neekta says

My brain hurt after each essay but that was mostly because it'd been totally blown to bits by brilliance.

Max says

An excellent and far-reaching overview of Foucault's writings and thought. Foucault was an odd dude, and he came at questions from a different angle than most—but that different angle yields sometimes chilling, sometimes exciting, always fascinating material. From his analysis, it's not hard to begin seeing human society as a power exchange game—all culture as kink. Maybe it is.

Khands says

The Foucault Reader is a compendium of Foucault's most important writings which are helpfully clarified in a series of interviews with the author.

Foucault's philosophical position is at least in part deconstructionism. Discounting linear historical structures he champions the notion that an accumulation of genealogical information will lead to a more useful and accurate knowledge downplaying the mythification of the past so common today.

Foucault brings into play a multiplicity of factors that define the historical evolution of mores and attitudes. He explains how the truth of developing science infected and altered the mechanisms of power which along with developing Bourgeois morality and the economic need for workforce affected attitudes and behaviors concerning the individual, delinquency and sexuality.

The depth and breadth of these changing attitudes is exemplified in the development of new architectural structures that support re-definition of the relation between mechanisms of power and the individual whether incarcerated in a penal facility, within educational structure or in the workplace.

Foucault's overall intention seems to be to find the truth of how western man has come to find his intellectual and psychological roll in contemporary society.

As with most philosophical writings Foucault requires thoughtful attention but this overview is a good starting point for those who wish to decipher his thinking.

Peter Tieryas says

I like bald philosophers.

Kevin J. Rogers says

I literally judged this book by its cover, picking it up while browsing around in a Waldenbooks shortly after college. I just thought the picture of Foucault on the cover was cool; it was a lucky break, because the book

is an outstanding introduction to Foucault's thought and methodology, and I've been working through his oeuvre ever since. I highly recommend this book as an introduction to this profound thinker's original and unique approach to doing philosophy.

John says

Ahhhh....I don't know. This is not fun to read. I tried really really hard to understand all of it, and it gave me a headache. I was just concentrating SO HARD on the discursive regimes, is the thing. This is all just so lacking in everything...human. There is no humanity in Foucault's writing. Everything is language, and discourse, and knowledge and power created by and exercised through discourse. Nothing is real, nothing has continuity- there's no such thing as liberty, "the concept of liberty is 'an invention of the ruling classes' and not fundamental to man's nature." There's not even a stable conception of the human body. Historians can never hope to find anything even approaching objective truth because there is no such thing as truth, truth is produced by power and different societies have different "regimes of truth." Historians can't find the true origin of anything, or any continuity between present and past, only discontinuity and discord. You know, I decided to study history because I am interested in people. In the lives of people. I think I have some sort of fundamental disconnection with those scholars who are only interested in ideas and theory. Where were the people, I want to ask? What were they doing? Yes, yes, your conception of the penal system as some sort of inhumane panopticon of discursive control over bodies through examinations and surveillance is GREAT and all, but who were the PEOPLE in these prisons, for pete's sake. Give me a human connection to this story!

Jeremy says

It's been a while since I read Discipline and Punish and Madness and Civilization, so I figured it was time for a refresher in Foucault's thinking. Reading this collection of excerpts from his books along with shorter articles and interviews, I'm amazed at how (am I really writing this about a french intellectual?) weirdly clear Foucault's broader project was.

This primer does an excellent job of pointing to the central tenants of his historical analysis about power, public health, incarceration, repression and sexuality and still leaves room to explore each of these hugely important topics in his full books. And the interview sections offer a fascinating, deeply useful glimpse into his own consideration of his work.

The only knock I have against it is that you might as well just sit down and read 2-3 of his books entirely, since they offer brilliant, often haunting observations about the development of institutional thinking in modern societies, observations that become even more powerful when presented in full length.

Dan says

This book is a good overview on Foucault's theories with regard to how we relate to power, how we relate to one another, and how we relate to ourselves. The earliest part of the book is about madness, and the later essays are about sex. The middle of the book, which excerpts a lot of material from Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison, is about institutions of penality.

In contrast to thinkers like Jacques Lacan, Jacques Derrida, Jean-Paul Sartre, Gilles Deleuze / Felix Guatari, Foucault is fairly straightforward in his argument and style--reading this book there was rarely a moment when I was unsure what Foucault was discussing.

This is all right as an introduction to Foucault's thought mostly because of the length of the pieces--some of which are interviews, others of which are excerpted from longer works. However, as the the editor (Rabinow) points out, there is little in here from Foucault's work in the 1970s. Thus, there is no mention anywhere of the Foucauldian concept of the "episteme." On the other hand, with the inclusion of some of Foucault's earliest writings and his latest writings, the reader can see how the questions Foucault asked and the methods he employed to investigate them remained a constant through his career.

John Wilson says

Foucault is a difficult writer because he is long-winded and takes ages to get to the point. This book will help a bit but I would read Understanding Foucault by Danaher et al. first.
