The political thought of Michel Foucault

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Michel Foucault was elected to the chair in the History of Systems of Thought at the Collège de France in 1970 and taught there until his death in 1984. This MPhil option surveys the contribution to political thought that he made during this period, with particular attention to three of the lecture courses he delivered, '"Society must be defended"' (1976), 'Security, territory, population' (1978), and 'The birth of biopolitics' (1979), which offered strikingly original narratives in the history of political thought as well as theorising distinctive concepts such as 'biopolitics', 'governmentality', and 'neoliberalism'.

Foucault is endlessly cited, but not so frequently read with the patience and care that his works deserve—something that is especially true of his 1970s lectures, which only became widely available (in any language) long after scholars had already made up their minds about what it was that he had had to say. Seminars will therefore concentrate on discussing Foucault's own texts, rather than approaching him through the work of commentators; secondary literature will remain very much secondary, but some is listed in what follows in case it is useful (with starred items especially recommended), in particular emphasising the contribution that intellectual historians have made in recent years to Foucault studies.

The approach is broadly chronological, except that everything to do with the *History of Sexuality* project has been bundled together in the sixth session. The reading lists that follow are entirely in English, though obviously there is something to be said for reading Foucault in the original for those students who are able to do that, and there will also be more secondary resources available to those who are versatile in other major European languages. A number of Foucault's books have been published by a variety of imprints; it generally doesn't matter whether you use the ones listed below, or any of the US or other equivalents.

I: Introduction: Foucault in 1970

Foucault was elected to the Collège de France after publishing a string of significant books during the 1960s—*Madness and Civilization* (1961), *The Birth of the Clinic* (1963), *The Order of Things* (1966), and *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (1969). This course will focus on what came afterwards, but we begin with an introductory week to take stock of where he had got to by the turn of the 1970s by looking at some short key texts—his December 1970 inaugural lecture, a 1971 essay on 'Nietzsche, genealogy, history', and the famous televised exchange from the same year with MIT linguist Noam Chomsky in the Netherlands.

Key texts:

Michel Foucault, 'Orders of discourse', *Social Sciences Information*, vol. 10, no. 2
	(April 1971), pp. 7-30.
Michel Foucault: 'Nietzsche, genealogy, history', in Paul Rabinow, ed. *The Foucault Reader*,
	(New York: Pantheon, 1984), pp. 76-100.
The Foucault-Chomsky debate: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3wfNl2L0Gf8 (video);
	https://chomsky.info/1971xxxx/ (transcript).

Other primary text:

Michel Foucault, *Lectures on the Will to Know: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1970-1971; and Oedipal Knowledge* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014).

Recommended secondary reading:

*Peter Ghosh, 'Citizen or subject: Michel Foucault in the history of ideas', *History of European Ideas*, vol. 24, no. 2 (1998), pp. 113-59.
Lois McNay, *Foucault: A Critical Introduction* (Cambridge: Polity, 1994), chs. 1-2.
Stuart Elden, *Foucault: The Birth of Power* (Cambridge: Polity, 2017), Introduction.
Stuart Elden, 'Foucault's inaugural lecture at the Collège de France, *L'ordre du discours*—comparison of the two different versions', https://progressivegeographies.com/2019/07/01/foucaults-inaugural-lecture-at-the-college-de-france-lordre-du-discours-comparison-of-the-two-different-versions/
Peter Wilkin, 'Chomsky and Foucault on human nature and politics: an essential difference', *Social Theory and Practice*, vol. 25, no. 2 (Summer 1999), pp. 177-210.

II: Disciplinary Power

Foucault's early years at the Collège de France focused on the elaboration of new ways of thinking about power. culminating in his 1975 book on the history of the modern prison, *Discipline and Punish*. That will be the key text for this week's discussion; if you've read it before, spend more time with the early 70s lecture material and with Stuart Elden's recent intellectual biography of Foucault during exactly this period, *The Birth of Power*.

Key text:

Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (London: Allen Lane, 1977).

Other primary texts:

*Michel Foucault, *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972-1977*, Colin Gordon, ed. (New York: Pantheon Books), chs. 1-3.
Michel Foucault, *The Punitive Society: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1972-1973* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015).
Michel Foucault, *Psychiatric Power: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1973-1974* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006).
Michel Foucault, *Abnormal: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1974-1975* (Verso: London, 2003).

Recommended secondary reading:

*Stuart Elden, *Foucault: The Birth of Power* (Cambridge: Polity, 2017).
Stuart Elden, 'Plague, Panopticon, police', *Surveillance & Society*, vol. 1, no. 3 (2003), pp. 240-53.
Joseph Rouse, 'Power/knowledge', in Gary Gutting, ed. *The Cambridge Companion to Foucault* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), pp. 92-114.
Bob Fine, 'Struggles against discipline: the theory and politics of Michel Foucault', *Capital & Class*, vol. 9 (1979), pp. 75-96.

III: "Society Must Be Defended"

1976 saw the appearance of the first volume of Foucault's *History of Sexuality*, which we will look at in the sixth session of this course. It was also when his annual lecture course at the Collège de France started to engage more closely than he had ever done before with major themes from the history of political thought—including war, sovereignty, and revolution—and it is perhaps also significant that "Society must be defended" was chosen to inaugurate the publication of Foucault's lectures in English translation.

Key text:

"Society Must Be Defended": Lectures at the Collège de France, 1975-1976
(London: Allen Lane, 2003).

Other primary texts:

Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, vol. 1: The Will to Knowledge* (London: Penguin Classics, 2020), Part Five, 'Right of death and power over life'.
Michel Foucault, 'Questions on geography', in *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972-1977*, Colin Gordon, ed. (New York: Pantheon Books), ch. 4.

Recommended secondary reading:

Pasquale Pasquino, 'Political theory of war and peace: Foucault and the history of modern political theory', *Economy and Society*, vol. 22, no. 1 (February 1993), pp. 77-88.
Julian Bourg, '*"Society Must Be Defended"* and the last Foucault', *Radical Philosophy Review*, vol. 7, no. 1 (2004), pp. 131-44.
Mariana Valverde, 'Law versus history: Foucault's genealogy of modern sovereignty', in Michael Dillon and Andrew W. Neal, eds. *Foucault on Politics, Security and War* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), pp. 135-50.
Achille Mbembe 'Necropolitics', *Public Culture*, vol. 15, no. 1 (2003), pp. 11-40.
Stuart Elden, *Foucault's Last Decade* (Cambridge: Polity, 2016), ch. 2.

IV: "Security, Territory, Population"

Continuing with his political explorations in his1978 lectures (he did not lecture in 1977), 'Security territory, population' continued Foucault's discussion of biopower and biopolitics—concepts introduced towards the end of 'Society must be defended'—with treatments of epidemics (smallpox, leprosy, plague), government and 'governmentality', the pastorate, *raison d'état*, and police. Although they were delivered eighteen months later, his pair of Tanner Lectures at Stanford University in 1979 draw on this material, and are also appropriately considered here.

Key texts:

Michel Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1977-1978* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007).
Michel Foucault, 'Omnes et singulatim: towards a criticism of "political reason"', Tanner Lectures on Human Values, Stanford University, 10 and 16 October 1979
https://tannerlectures.utah.edu/_documents/a-to-z/f/foucault81.pdf

Recommended secondary reading:

Graham Burchell, Colin Gordon, and Peter Miller, eds. *The Foucault Effect: Studies in Governmentality* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991).
Mark Bevir, 'Rethinking governmentality: towards genealogies of governance', *European Journal of Social Theory*, vol. 13, no. 4 (2010), pp. 423-41.
Jacques Donzelot, 'Michel Foucault and liberal intelligence', *Economy & Society*, vol. 37, no. 1, pp. 115-34.
Stuart Elden, 'Governmentality, calculation, territory', *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, vol. 25 (2007), pp. 562-80.
Ben Golder, 'Foucault and the genealogy of pastoral power', *Radical Philosophy Review*, vol. 10, no. 2 (2007), pp. 157-76.
Mariana Valverde, 'Genealogies of European states: Foucauldian reflections, *Economy and Society*, vol. 36, no. 1 (2007), pp. 159-78.
Stuart Elden, *Foucault's Last Decade* (Cambridge: Polity, 2016), ch. 4.

V: "The Birth of Biopolitics"

After 'Security, territory, population', Foucault became interested in non-Western strategies of modernisation and spent time in 1978 in both Japan and Iran, the latter of which he wrote about for the Italian newspaper *Corriere della sera*. His 1979 lectures, which took place against the backdrop of the Islamic Revolution, had been advertised under the title 'the birth of biopolitics', but he ended up talking about other things. In particular, these lectures have attracted attention—especially in more recent years—because of Foucault's discussion of what he calls the 'liberal art of government' and his treatment of 'neo-liberalism' in both its German (think *Ordoliberalismus*) and American (think Gary Becker) incarnations.

Key text:

Michel Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1978-1979* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008).

Other primary texts:

Michel Foucault and others, writings on Iran, in the Appendix to Janet Afary and Kevin B. Anderson, *Foucault and the Iranian Revolution: Gender and the Seductions of Islamism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), pp. 180-277.

Recommended secondary reading:

Thomas Lemke, '"The birth of biopolitics": Michel Foucault's lecture at the Collège de France on neo-liberal governmentality', *Economy and Society*, vol. 30, no. 2 (2001), pp. 190-207.
*Keith Tribe, 'The political economy of modernity: Foucault's Collège de France lectures of 1978 and 1979', *Economy and Society*, vol. 38, no. 4 (November 2009), pp. 679-98.
Gary S. Becker, François Ewald, and Bernard E. Harcourt, '"Becker on Ewald on Foucault on Becker": American neoliberalism and Michel Foucault's 1979 *Birth of Biopolitics* lectures', University of Chicago Law School, October 2012. https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=2142163.

Colin Gordon, 'A note on "Becker on Ewald on Foucault on Becker"', *Foucault News*, February 2013 https://michel-foucault.com/2013/02/15/colin-gordon-a-note-on-becker-on-ewald-on-foucault-on-becker-2013/.

Jessica Whyte, 'Is revolution desirable? Michel Foucault on revolution, neoliberalism and rights', in Ben Golder, ed. *Re-Reading Foucault: On Law, Power and Rights* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2013), pp. 207-28.

Melinda Cooper, 'The law of the household: Foucault, neoliberalism, and the Iranian Revolution', in Vanessa Lemm and Miguel Vatter, eds. *The Government of Life: Foucault, biopolitics and neoliberalism* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2014), pp. 29-58.

Daniel Zamora and Michael C. Behrent, eds. *Foucault and Neoliberalism* (Cambridge: Polity, 2015).

Matthew Specter, Michael C. Behrent, Mitchell Dean, and Serge Audier, 'Forum: Foucault and Neoliberalism', *History and Theory*, vol. 54, no. 3 (October 2015), pp. 367-418.

David Newheiser, 'Foucault, Gary Becker and the critique of neoliberalism', *Theory, Culture & Society*, vol. 33, no. 5 (September 2016), pp. 3-21.

*Alex Randall, 'Foucault, liberalism, and the Islamic revolution in Iran', University of Cambridge M.Phil thesis, 2017 [available in the Seeley Library].

VI: The History of Sexuality

We have focused hitherto on Foucault's writings about politics. Many would say that his major undertaking during this period was his work on his multivolume *History of Sexuality*. The first volume was published in 1976, considering eighteenth- and nineteenth-century discourses of sex. Then there was a long gap, during which time Foucault revised his plans for the project quite considerably, and then two volumes about the Greeks (*The Use of Pleasure*) and the Romans (*The Care of the Self*) appeared in 1984, the year in which Foucault died. It has long been known that the fourth volume was intended to be about the early Christians, but not that a complete manuscript existed. *Les aveux de la chair* was published in France in 2018, the English translation is scheduled for early 2021, and because it is new—and therefore exciting!—we will concentrate our attention on this book (though there is of course also a wealth of interesting material in vols. 1-3).

Key text:

Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, vol. 4: Confessions of the Flesh* (London: Penguin Classics, forthcoming January 2021).

Other primary texts:

Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, vol. 1: The Will to Knowledge* (London: Penguin Classics, 2020).

Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, vol. 2: The Use of Pleasure* (London: Penguin Classics, 2020).

Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, vol. 3: The Care of the Self* (London: Penguin Classics, 2020).

Recommended secondary reading:

*Stuart Elden, *Foucault's Last Decade* (Cambridge: Polity, 2016).
Stuart Elden, 'Review: Foucault's *Confessions of the Flesh*', *Theory, Culture & Society*,
     March 2018 https://www.theoryculturesociety.org/review-foucaults-confessions-flesh/.
Lois McNay, *Foucault and Feminism* (Cambridge: Polity, 1992).

VII: Conclusion: Foucault in 1984

Foucault died in 1984 aged 57, an early casualty of the HIV/AIDS pandemic. We'll look at his late essay, 'What is Enlightenment?' for this final session, but it also affords an opportunity for seminar participants to pursue their own interests, either to read through some of Foucault's 1980s lecture courses, with their distinctive focus on practices of truth-telling and what the ancient Greeks called *parrhesia*, or to review the 'Foucault-Habermas' debate that was constructed posthumously, or to think about the subsequent trajectories of the inquiries that he kick-started, or to work towards an all-things-considered view of his intellectual achievement in retrospect.

Key text:

Michel Foucault: 'What is Enlightenment?', in Paul Rabinow, ed. *The Foucault Reader*,
     (New York: Pantheon, 1984), pp. 32-50.

Other primary texts:

Michel Foucault, *On the Government of the Living: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1979-
     1980* (Basingtoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014).
Michel Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1981-
     1982* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005).
Michel Foucault, *The Government of Self and Others: Lectures at the Collège de France,
     1982-1983* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010).
Michel Foucault, *The Courage of the Truth (The Government of Self and Others II): Lectures
     at the Collège de France, 1983-1984* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011).

Recommended secondary reading:

Jürgen Habermas, 'Taking aim at the heart of the present', in David Couzens Hoy, ed.
     Foucault: A Critical Reader (Oxford: Blackwell, 1986) pp. 103-108.
Pasquale Pasquino, 'Michel Foucault (1926-84): The will to knowledge', *Economy
     and Society*, vol. 15, no. 1 (February 1986), pp. 97-109.
Nancy Fraser, 'From discipline to flexibilization: rereading Foucault in the shadow of
     globalization', *Constellations*, vol. 10, no. 2 (2003), pp. 160-71 (and see also the
     immediately following Thomas Lemke, 'Comment on Nancy Fraser' pp. 172-9).
Amy Allen, 'Foucault and Enlightenment: a critical reappraisal', *Constellations*,
     vol. 10, no. 2 (2003), pp. 180-98.
Maurizio Passerin d'Entreves, 'Between Nietzsche and Kant: Michel Foucault's reading of
     "What is Enlightenment?"', *History of Political Thought*, vol. 20, no. 2 (February
     1999), pp. 337-56.