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## MICHEL FOUCAULT'S ARCHAEOLOGY OF SCIENTIFIC REASON

This book is an important introduction to and critical interpretation of the work of the major French thinker, Michel Foucault. Through comprehensive and detailed analyses of such important texts as *The history of madness in the age of reason*, *The birth of the clinic*, *The order of things*, and *The archaeology of knowledge*, Professor Gutting provides a lucid exposition of Foucault's "archaeological" approach to the history of thought, a method for uncovering the "unconscious" structures that set boundaries on the thinking of a given epoch.

The book also casts Foucault in a new light, relating his work to two major but neglected influences on him: Gaston Bachelard's philosophy of science and Georges Canguilhem's history of science. This perspective yields a new and valuable understanding of Foucault as a historian and philosopher of science, balancing and complementing the more common view that he was primarily a social critic and theorist.

An excellent guide for those first approaching Foucault's work, the book will also be a challenging interpretation and evaluation for those already familiar with his writings.

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To  
ANASTASIA  
τῆ καλλίστῃ

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## PREFACE

Any study of Michel Foucault should anticipate two sorts of readers. On the one hand, there are those intrigued by what they have heard of his ideas and methods but frustrated by texts they find too difficult to penetrate. They turn to secondary literature to dispel their bemusement and confusion. On the other hand, there are those who have worked through at least some of his books with understanding and appreciation and are looking for further interpretative and critical perspectives. In writing this book, I have tried to keep both audiences in mind. I have put a very high premium on lucid and thorough explanations of Foucault's ideas, and my analyses offer coherent interpretations of each work as a whole, contrary to the tendency of many commentators to highlight only selected aspects of a given text. Because of this, I hope the book will be a useful resource for those making a first approach to Foucault's thought. For those already familiar with Foucault, it offers a new perspective that places his thought in the context of recent French history and philosophy of science, particularly the work of Gaston Bachelard and Georges Canguilhem. (It also provides an introduction to these two thinkers, who are not very well known in English-speaking countries.) This opens up a fresh and, I hope to show, fruitful way of understanding Foucault as a historian and philosopher of science, balancing and



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complementing the current standard construal of him as a social critic and theorist.

To date, most studies of Foucault have rightly taken the form of introductory surveys of the entire body of his work, aiming at a comprehensive preliminary understanding of his main claims, motivations, and methods. Here Alan Sheridan's *Foucault: The will to truth* probably remains the best single overall guide, although there is clearly a need for an updated and improved general introduction. More recently, there have appeared a number of studies with narrower interpretative and critical foci, most notably Dreyfus and Rabinow's *Michel Foucault: beyond structuralism and hermeneutics* and John Rajchman's *Michel Foucault and the freedom of philosophy*. These, like almost all more specialized work on Foucault over the last few years, are primarily concerned with the theme of the interconnection of power and knowledge that was Foucault's own primary emphasis during the 1970s. There are signs that the next wave of Foucault analysis will focus on the ethical direction his work took in the 1980s. By contrast, this book turns back to the earlier, explicitly archaeological period of Foucault's writings. I have chosen this emphasis not only because these writings have been relatively neglected in recent discussions but also because they are both difficult and important enough to warrant much closer scrutiny than they have yet received. Moreover, beyond their great intrinsic importance, they are crucial for an adequate understanding of Foucault's later development. As we shall see, some major elements of the later knowledge–power theme are implicit from the beginning of Foucault's work; and the archaeological approach to the history of thought remains a key element in the later genealogical method. Without downgrading the value and distinctiveness of the work after AK,<sup>1</sup> I want to call attention to the importance of the preceding archaeological period.

In addition to numerous specific points of interpretation and evaluation, my analysis of Foucault's archaeology will support three more general conclusions. First, archaeology is not an isolated method reflecting Foucault's idiosyncratic approach to the history of thought. Rather, it is rooted in the French tradition of history and philosophy of science and is specifically developed in the context of Gaston Bachelard's philosophy of science and

1. See list of abbreviations, p. xii.

through an extension and transformation of Georges Canguilhem's history of science.

Second, Foucault's archaeology is essentially grounded in historical practice rather than philosophical theory. It is a method of historical analysis that was forged, pragmatically and piecemeal, to deal with specific problems posed by the history of thought. Foucault did not develop it as the corollary of fundamental philosophical views about language, meaning, and truth. This is not to deny that his historical work has a philosophical intent or that philosophical issues are frequently in the background of his discussions. But his archaeological method originates primarily from concrete struggles for historical understanding, not from prior philosophical commitments. This understanding of archaeology is closely linked to Foucault's radical reconception of the philosophical enterprise. He rejects the traditional goal of ultimate, fundamental Truth and instead construes philosophy as an instrument for realizing concrete and local objectives in the struggle for human liberation.

Third, Foucault's archaeology is not, as critics have often maintained, an engine of universal skepticism or relativism, undermining all pretensions to truth and objectivity. The project of archaeological analysis does not, in itself, question the objectivity or validity of a body of knowledge to which it is applied. There is no reason, for example, to think that an archaeology of modern physics or chemistry would have an epistemically subversive intent or effect. Moreover, as we shall see, even Foucault's analyses of the much more dubious medical and social scientific disciplines typically allow them a substantial core of objective truth. Properly understood, archaeology is a technique for revealing how a discipline has developed norms of validity and objectivity, not for questioning the very possibility of any such norms. Archaeology may, of course, find that some disciplines are far less scientific than their own self-understanding suggests. But we shall see that, even in such cases, it is designed as a careful scrutiny of the epistemic claims of a discipline, not as an a priori instrument for rejecting these claims.

The book begins with a brief introduction that formulates Foucault's fundamental historicophilosophical project and quickly surveys the whole of his work as carrying out this project. Chapter 1 provides some necessary background on Bachelard and Canguilhem and on Foucault's connection to them. We then turn to a detailed exegesis of the main books Foucault published

through 1969 and assessments of their historical and philosophical significance. Chapter 2 deals with Foucault's study of the historical roots of modern psychology and psychiatry in FD. It begins with background studies of his two earlier treatments of these disciplines, *Maladie mentale et personnalité* and the "Introduction" to Binswanger's *Dream and existence*. I am also concerned with developing an interpretation and evaluation of FD as a whole (not of just the greatly condensed English translation, *Madness and civilization*) and with showing how it sets the agenda for all of Foucault's earlier work. Chapter 3 deals with BC, both to offer a close analysis of its often dense text and to show its strong methodological ties to Canguilhem's approach to the history of science. Chapters 4 and 5 offer a detailed treatment of OT, providing both an overall interpretation and evaluation of its content and an explication of its full development of Foucault's archaeological method. In interpreting OT, my concern is not only to elucidate each element of its wide-ranging discussion but to show how all these elements fit together into a close though complex unity. I also show how the mature archaeological method of OT both derives from and transforms the approaches of Bachelard and Canguilhem, and I offer a critical assessment of its value as an approach to the history of thought. Chapter 6 turns to the explicit methodological account that Foucault puts forward in AK, paying particular attention to the relationship of this methodology to other approaches to the history of thought and to Foucault's own historical studies. Chapter 7 offers a concluding philosophical evaluation of Foucault's project of an archaeological history of reason.

### Abbreviations

The following abbreviations are used in citing Foucault's writings. (Full references are given in the Bibliography.)

AK:	<i>The archaeology of knowledge</i>
BC:	<i>The birth of the clinic</i>
DP:	<i>Discipline and punish</i>
FD:	<i>Folie et déraison</i>
HS:	<i>History of sexuality</i>
MC:	<i>Madness and civilization</i>
MMP:	<i>Maladie mentale et personnalité</i>

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MMPsy:	<i>Mental Illness and Psychology</i>
OT:	<i>The order of things</i>
RE:	"Introduction" to Binswanger's <i>Rêve et existence</i>

In general, citations from these works are from the English translations listed in the Bibliography. Translations from RE, from parts of FD not included in MC, and from parts of MMP not included in MMPsy are mine. Translations from other works by Foucault are mine except when the notes cite a published English version.

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