

The Cambridge Foucault Lexicon, ed. Leonard Lawlor & John Nale (CUP, 2014)

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Entry: Martin Heidegger (1889-1976)

Foucault's work can be linked to that of Heidegger via a series of themes, such as nihilism, technology, truth, a critique of humanism, and their respective relations to Nietzsche. Wherever one begins, however, complex stories emerge in which proximities and differences compete and often overlap to the point where forging it all into one perspective is impossible. Both thinkers confront a history through which thought has arrived at an impasse. They both think it necessary to restructure and redirect philosophical thought in order to resolve this impasse, and they both treat the practice of thinking as inseparable from close attention to the structure and history of thinking itself. Within this broad area of agreement, ontology, subjectivity, and finitude feature prominently, but these themes are in turn developed in divergent ways, leading to quite different outcomes. A perspective on this complex relation can be opened up by considering the role of time in their respective critiques of the relation between philosophy and anthropology.

In *The Order of Things*, Foucault considers the transition from the classical to the modern period, which he regards as having drawn thought into an impasse from which it has struggled to escape. If knowledge is a representation of the world, and representation an activity of the subject, then knowledge can only be grounded in an account of the subject as one who represents. The attempt to know the subject in this way is reflected in Kant's account of space and time as forms of sense, and his deduction of the transcendental conditions for the possibility of our experience of the world. But Kant's procedure committed thought to treating the human as at once an empirical being and the bearer of a set of transcendental conditions; that is, as what

Foucault calls “an empirico-transcendental doublet” (EOT, 318), a being that appears on both sides of the divide, and which is therefore bound to elude itself. In complementary fashion, the human sciences emerging in the nineteenth century set out to understand the human in a quite different way, but the organization of ‘objective’ knowledge of the human in scientific form demanded a rigorous foundation, and this demand in turn called for an inquiry into the human as the finite subject who represents. The analysis of representation led back to Kant and to a transcendental inquiry into the conditions of knowledge; but insofar as human being is conditioned by biology, social and economic reality, and language, knowledge of the subject was found to depend in turn on knowledge of these further objective conditions. As Foucault describes it, this led to a fluctuating movement between branches of inquiry, while a fixed point on which the body of thought as a whole might rest remained out of reach.

The difficulty is centered on the finitude of the human, and led, as Foucault describes, to a call for an “analytic of finitude,” a discourse addressing “a fundamental finitude which rests on nothing but its own existence as a fact, and opens upon the positivity of all concrete limitation” (EOT, 315). In addition, this same discourse should deal directly with the concrete instances of finitude in human existence, without referring them to some deeper underlying condition. But as long as what counted as knowledge was restricted to representations of objective reality, this would remain an impossible task. The account of knowledge would therefore have to change in order that acquiring knowledge of the conditions of representation did not re-open the same question over again, while at the same time also permitting it to address the positivity of concrete human existence. Phenomenology promised answers to these issues. Husserl had sought an adequate basis for the sciences in a more fundamental knowledge of the subject, and had devised a methodology and a new conception of objectivity in order to achieve this. Moreover, it is easy

to make the link from the analytic of finitude as Foucault describes it here to the existential analytic that Heidegger carries out in *Being and Time*. This is directed precisely towards a determination of the essential finitude of Dasein, which it finds in a temporal finitude defined by Dasein's relation to its own mortality and formalized in the account of the original temporality of Dasein in Division Two of *Being and Time*. What is clear for both Heidegger and Foucault is that the question of human finitude, its relation to concrete human existence, and to knowledge, cannot be addressed at an epistemological level alone and that an ontological reflection is also required.

For Heidegger, the history of philosophy can be read as a forgetting of the question of Being as such, which he regarded as having been so concealed by the metaphysical tradition that philosophy had ceased to take it seriously as a question at all. Underpinning his call to remedy this neglect is the ontological difference between beings and Being. Whereas the question of what a thing is leads to an account of its essence, a consideration of essence itself leads to a quite different account of the conditions under which disclosure occurs at all. In this way, the most basic sense of what it means to be – to be anything at all – is disentangled from notions of objectivity and re-thought as the question of Being as such. Since we are the beings engaged by this question, the disclosure of Being occurs in and through our existence. However, in Heidegger's view, the philosophical tradition failed to inquire into this existence appropriately; for example, Descartes identified the "I" simply as a thinking thing, and thereby placed it alongside things in the world, its being merely modified by the addition of thinking. When Kant identified the question 'What is man?' as fundamental to philosophy, it seemed that this error may have been corrected, and the way opened to a philosophical anthropology that could set thinking on a secure footing. However, Heidegger remained critical, arguing in *Kant and the*

Problem of Metaphysics that Kant did not deliver on this promise. In his analysis of transcendental imagination, Kant brought to light the importance of time in the formation of experience, but did not pursue the inquiry far enough to uncover the temporal character of its foundation in the transcendental subject, which as result remained obscure, leaving the inquiry into the Being of the subject incomplete. Moreover, Kant's anthropological inquiries remain, for Heidegger, incomplete and poorly conceived: as they are concerned with the faculties of the soul, they cannot be simply empirical, yet as they do not engage what is for Heidegger the fundamental theme of transcendence, they cannot carry through their analyses sufficiently to reveal the ground of their own possibility, and the ground of the possibility of metaphysics itself. An ontology of the subject as a subject, and not as an empirical object requires, he argues, an account of the temporal structure of the transcendental imagination (Heidegger 1990, 92); that is, the temporal structure of the synthetic activity by which intuitions are subsumed beneath concepts and our experience given structure and coherence.

Heidegger's attention to the ontological structure of Dasein is a direct response to this problem. Recognizing the ontological difference, it treats the existence of Dasein as a form of disclosure through which Being is presented, and does so in such a way that neither Dasein nor Being is treated as an object of knowledge. Rather than limiting this clarification of the disclosure of Being to the way that we understand, reason, and perceive the world, Heidegger extended his analysis to include the practical aspect of our existence, the way our actions take shape around concerns and aims, the way we share our world with others, settle into familiar routines, and sometimes act with a freedom born out of a readiness to confront our basic existential condition. However, while Heidegger presents the existential analytic in Division One of *Being and Time*, it is in Division Two that the properly ontological aspect of the account

comes to the fore, as it is here that Heidegger sets out his conception of original temporality that underpins the account of Dasein's finite existence in Division One. The Being of Dasein is temporal, in the sense that each of the fundamental modes by which it exists, and by which it discloses Being, have a temporal structure. Together, these constitute the original unity that is the ecstatic temporality of Dasein. Fundamental to Heidegger's account is that Dasein's temporality is more fundamental than our everyday sense of time and cannot be derived from it. While Heidegger provides a radical analytic of human finitude (without any appeal to infinity or eternity), he accords a fundamental priority to the ontological dimension of Dasein's concrete existence as that which is responsible for Dasein's existence occurring as it does, and as that from which thinking must take its lead. Dasein is the site of the disclosure of Being, and the further thinking presses in its attempt to grasp the condition of Dasein as disclosive, rather than simply as disclosed, the further it is drawn towards the event of disclosure itself, and to Being. From this perspective, making up for what was missing in Kant entails insisting that anthropology can never adequately become a ground for philosophical thought, because the more fully such thinking engages with its true ground, the further it moves from the terrain of anthropology.

Foucault rarely referred to Heidegger directly in his published work, but there are a number of passages where he appears to have Heidegger very much in mind. For the most part, these are critical in tone (though not too much need be read into this), but there is one more positive reference. In 1954 Foucault published an introduction to Ludwig Binswanger's *Dream and Existence*, a study in existential psychiatry influenced by Heidegger. The practice of Daseinanalysis it proposes and develops is indebted to the existential analytic of Dasein set out in *Being and Time*, and Foucault's enthusiasm for Binswanger implies at least a degree of

enthusiasm for Heidegger as well. There are passages in which Foucault praises an inquiry closely aligned to the existential analytic that Heidegger undertook in *Being and Time*, and in terms similar to those in which he appears to describe that analytic elsewhere. However, it is also clear that even at this early stage Foucault had serious reservations over the form of Heidegger's inquiry. Explaining his interest in Binswanger, Foucault refers to the way Binswanger's analysis of existence avoids any *a priori* distinction between ontology and anthropology (EDE, 32). This is in sharp contrast to Heidegger, for whom this distinction was fundamental, and anthropology remained compromised by its lack of a properly ontological basis, carrying over a conception of the human from the metaphysical tradition without submitting that conception to revision in the light of a renewed engagement with the question of Being as such. In this way, anthropology was, for Heidegger, to be ranked alongside biology, history, and political science as a science of the human based on a misconceived confidence in the ideal of objectivity. Foucault's comments in the Introduction to *Dream and Existence* therefore seem to be explicitly anti-phenomenological, in spite of the alignment with Heidegger implied elsewhere in the same text. Moreover, the true villain of the piece, standing in the wings, is Kant, who installed the distinction between positive science and transcendental philosophy at the heart of thinking, and who saw that the thinking subject cannot be disclosed as a subject through an empirical reflection. Having refused the phenomenological approach, Foucault then also rules out both a 'pre-critical' indifference to the distinction between the positive sciences and transcendental philosophy, and a simple return to the anthropology that Kant proposed. He seems, therefore, to have left himself with little room to maneuver. A different solution is required, and he finds it in an interpretation of Kant's anthropology that diverges sharply from that of Heidegger, yet does so through a strategy of reading that recalls Heidegger's "destruction" of the history of ontology;

an approach aimed precisely at retrieving possibilities that had been closed off by the metaphysical tradition (Heidegger, 1962 §6, and 1982 §5).

Foucault draws attention to the different roles played by time in the *Critique of Pure Reason* and the *Anthropology*, a difference that arises from the nature of the *Anthropology's* enquiry into what the human individual “as a free-acting being makes of himself, or can and should make of himself” (Kant 2006 3), not only by shaping our conduct, but also by cultivating our sensibility, understanding and taste. Kant explores this through, first, a rehearsal of structures familiar from the *Critique of Pure Reason* (sensibility, understanding, reason), and then a consideration of pleasure, displeasure, and desire that takes in discussions of topics such as distraction, mental illness, dreams, wit, boredom, eating alone or in company, before going on to deal with character, physiognomy, and the character of races and of the sexes, and more besides. Whereas in the *Critique of Pure Reason*, the subject is divided between a transcendental unity that anchors the syntheses of the multiple, and the empirical self that appears as an object of intuition, in the *Anthropology* the subject experiments with provisional variations on the human, each of which may be modified or undone in turn. Here, writes Foucault, time is not the transparent condition of synthetic activity, but rather that by which it is left obscure and incomplete. Simple determination gives way to a gradual and uncertain activity that Kant names *Kunst*. Time in the *Anthropology* is described by Foucault as the guarantee of a “dispersion that cannot be contained (*qui n'est pas surmontable*)” (EIKA, 89). It is “the dispersion of the synthetic activity with regard to itself” (EIKA, 89), the non-coincidence of synthesis with itself as it works through time. By virtue of this structural incompleteness, Foucault writes, the time of the *Anthropology* eats away at the coherence of synthesis from within, making room for error, correction, repetition, and thereby also a certain freedom (EIKA, 91). The message that Foucault

draws from this is that one must avoid a ‘false’ anthropology that seeks to return to a beginning point, whether this be in an empirical sense, or by recourse to a transcendental *a priori*. Instead, he proposes that the *a priori* of the *Critique of Pure Reason* be repeated “in a truly temporal dimension” (EIKA, 93). Like Heidegger, then, Foucault sees time as the key to Kant’s anthropology; and like Heidegger, Foucault tries to identify the temporal structure of synthesis itself. However, where Heidegger directs his attention to the temporal dimension of the synthetic activity of the transcendental imagination, Foucault sees the locus of the problem shift to the anthropology, where the purity of this synthesis is adulterated by the time of concrete life. From the point of view of Foucault’s depiction of the way thought in modernity has been caught in an impasse, this disruption of dichotomy between the empirical and the transcendental, between the actual existence and the conditions that make it possible, seems to promise thinking a new future.

However, there are two obstacles that make it impossible simply to take Kant’s formulation in the *Anthropology* as a solution to the problem. First, the presentation of time as a linear series of events has to be constituted by an antecedent activity that cannot itself be represented in the series. The transcendental role of time as the condition of the order of experience is thereby kept out of view, but for this reason the disruptive potentiality of temporal dispersion is also blocked; that is, the account sits firmly within the very structure from which Foucault wishes to escape. Also playing a vital role here is language, which is seen as a regulated articulation of the freedoms by which individuals form a community, and thereby accomplish a “concrete universal” (EIKA, 102). If time itself is the dimension of the ‘originary’ (*l’originnaire*), Foucault endorses the view that it “is not to be found in an already given, secret meaning, but in what is the most manifest path of the exchange” (EIKA, 102-103). This becomes problematic, in Foucault’s view, because Kant adopts a ‘popular’ idiom for the *Anthropology*. By appealing to a

common language, shared between author and public, it fosters a certainty that in spite of the dispersion of time, something clear and whole is nonetheless given, or at least almost within our grasp. Taking up a language that is already familiar from our understanding of the world, the *Anthropology* deploys it to grasp the human, time is confirmed as an order of empirical events, and the radical potential of temporal dispersion is lost. So when Foucault writes that the reader of the *Anthropology* is placed in milieu of “total evidence” where any number of new examples can be found, but that “‘popular knowledge’ is not the first, the earliest, nor the most naïve form of truth” (EIKA 94), he is on a path parallel to Heidegger’s contrast of authenticity to the common currency of the impersonal ‘they’ (Heidegger, 2010, §27). Moreover, like Heidegger, his solution is to recover a temporal form that has been concealed by this semblance of self-evidence. The difference is that for Heidegger, an account of the Being of the subject is only possible once a clear distinction is made between everyday time and the original time of the ontological, whereas Foucault welcomes the way the two are folded together in Kant’s anthropology (a view that matches the one he sketched ten years earlier in his Introduction to Binswanger’s text). But in order that the transformative repercussions of this shift be felt, the screen of self-evidence placed around it when Kant cast anthropology as a ‘popular’ discourse has to be drawn away.

Foucault’s work, as it unfolds later in the 1960s and beyond, retrieves the temporal dispersion he found in Kant from the restrictions of the ‘popular’ idiom, allowing dispersion to shape a different understanding of the subject in its relation to ontology, and to knowledge. Archaeological method suspends readymade unities (actors, discourses, works, traditions, artifacts), in the analysis of discourse, exposing history as the gradual, piecemeal, and provisional formation of such unities, their temporary stability, and their ultimate deformation. In this way, it turns a forensic eye on the genesis of forms that the analysis of discourse generally

either takes for granted, or defines as the conditions of possibility for a given class of events. Foucault sees the dispersion of events in their multiplicity challenge the synthetic activity by which such formal characteristics emerge, and by which things, ideas, and even thought itself, become intelligible. The archaeological analogue of synthesis produces discourse from discourse, according to rules formed within discourse that are transformed along with the shifting patterns they describe, and yet for which they nonetheless establish local conditions of existence. As a response to Kant, and to Heidegger's response to Kant, archaeology opens synthesis up to what Foucault again identifies as "temporal dispersion" (EAK, 25). The difference is that now the dispersion is not caused by an underlying linear time that eventually undoes the work of the subject, but by plural times that are the formation and deformation of unities and regularities. The division between the transcendental and the empirical is erased, and, in the terms Foucault used in his introduction to Binswanger, there is no *a priori* distinction between ontology and anthropology.

Foucault's subsequent introduction of power into his analyses is already well prepared here; the Nietzschean conception of the will-to-power maps easily onto the transformation in the conditions of existence that comes with the ongoing production of discourse. Similarly, the Nietzschean refusal to see an agent behind the act, or an ideal behind things as they appear, can already be found in archaeology. That said, there is certainly a shift in emphasis in Foucault's work to treat the rules shaping what can be said and done in terms of power, and not just in view of the various functions and positions of discourse. With the emergence of power as a theme in Foucault's work also comes a further point of comparison with Heidegger, in that Foucault's insistence that power is not a thing and should not be treated as if it were a substance echoes Heidegger's approach to Being and the ontological difference. The comparison is a valid one, but

only up to a certain point, and the point at which it breaks down reveals an important difference between Heidegger and Foucault over the possibility of ethics and its relation to ontology. In *Being and Time*, Heidegger describes how we are thrown into a historical situation we did not choose, and which we cannot master. Even so, it is possible for us to confront our own finitude, and thereby to modify our relation to our own ontological condition. In this way, we can transcend the immediate conditions of our factual life. What we cannot do is change the fundamental conditions by which Being is disclosed, which make up the temporal structure of our existence. As Heidegger moved beyond *Being and Time*, the attempt to determine the temporal horizons of the meaning of Being gave way to a recognition that Being is historical, or rather that the truth of Being is historical, its disclosure taking different forms in different epochs. Since the prevailing form of the disclosure of Being varies from epoch to epoch, at any one time we stand within an opening that sets the conditions of interpretation without itself being open to such interpretation. It is therefore impossible to draw the different epochs of the history of Being into a single account. Similarly for Foucault, how things appear as objects of discourse, and thus also the way that subjects are situated in relation to them, vary in ways that the discourses themselves cannot describe. In *The Order of Things*, this took the form of a division of history into different epistemes, with the working definition of knowledge being internal to each. Even as this large scale structure gave way to more finely differentiated analyses, it remained the case for Foucault that we become subjects in relation to what can be established as true or false at any given time, and that this is contingent on the prevailing regularities in the relations of power and knowledge. The difference between Heidegger and Foucault here turns on the question of the priority attributed to the ontological order. The history of the truth of Being as described by Heidegger sees the way Being is disclosed change from one epoch to another, but

what does not change is that thinking cannot alter the form of the disclosive event of Being. By contrast, Foucault can be said to preserve the ontological difference while dispensing with the priority of the rules of givenness at any time. In this respect, Heidegger's move from a unified temporal horizon of the understanding of Being to a discontinuous history of the truth of Being changes very little from Foucault's perspective. Like Heidegger, Foucault thinks we can address our own finitude (albeit differently), transcend the immediate conditions of our factual life, and modify our relation to the conditions that make us what we are. But this is where the similarity ends, as the relations of power linking us to others, to institutions, and to forms of knowledge that feature in Foucault's account are in a process of continual change to which our own discourses and critical activities can contribute. For Foucault, we can intervene not just in our relation to our own ontological condition, as Heidegger proposes, but in that very condition itself. This is evident in his later writing, where there is greater emphasis on small degrees of change, rather than epochal shifts, and also on the capacity of the subject to modify them, aided by critical discourses directed at very specific local conditions: in "What is Enlightenment?" Foucault describes this as the "undefined work of freedom" (EEW1, 316). For Foucault, we are contemporaries with power in a way that, for Heidegger, we are never contemporaries with Being.

Time, therefore, is central to Foucault's philosophy, and most especially to his divergence from Heidegger. Re-situating the "original" temporality by virtue of which things take on actual existence, Foucault places it within the discourse whose unities it forms. Not only does the time of discourse occur only within and as discourse, there is no formal determination of time that can be found repeatedly over a variety of circumstances. Ultimately, it is by virtue of this break with

the legacy of formalism that the ontological dimension of Foucault's analyses can be linked to a certain positivity, and this marks the divergence between his thought and that of Heidegger.

By David Webb

See also:

Finitude

Phenomenology

Ludwig Binswanger

Immanuel Kant

Suggested Reading:

Heidegger, Martin. 2010. *Being and Time*, tr., Joan Stambaugh, revised with a Forward by Dennis J. Schmidt (Albany: The SUNY Press).

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Kant, Immanuel. 2006. *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View*, trs., Robert B. Louden and Manfred Kuehn (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press).

Han-Pile, Beatrice. 2003. "Foucault and Heidegger on Kant and Finitude," in Milchman, Alan, and Rosenberg, Alan, eds., *Foucault and Heidegger; Critical Encounters* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press), pp. 127-162.