Book Review

Kelly, Mark G. E. 2009. *The Political Philosophy of Michel Foucault*. London: Routledge.

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Ronjon Paul Datta

Assistant Professor of Social and Cultural Theory, Department of Sociology, University of Alberta, Canada.

rpauldatta@gmail.com

Kelly's book presents the first major attempt to systematically examine Foucault's approach to power and politics since Simon's *Foucault and the Political* (1995). The project is a significant one given the recent global introductory treatments of Foucault's philosophy, (e.g., May 2006; Paras 2006; O'Farrell 2005). Challenging the predominant reception of Foucault's works as lacking philosophical consistency, exemplified most recently by Paras (2006), Kelly, argues for it in Foucault's political philosophy (1-2). For this, the author should be commended. Drawing on a fairly comprehensive, if not always persuasive, exegesis of Foucault's work, Kelly's central argument, productively drawing on Deleuze (1988), is that Foucault's political philosophy consistently approaches matters of the constraints on becoming otherwise through a materialist and anti-subjectivist ontology of violence. Foucault's archaeological works are shown to be an analysis of the violence that discourse does to things thus shaping the macro-level of societal problematisations of existence. The genealogical works are then argued to highlight the micro-level of violence manifested in the intentional exercising of power by individuals over other persons. This distillation then serves as the backdrop for arguing that the practices of critique and ethics are the means for effectively resisting macro- and micro- violence respectively, without falling prey to the traps of humanism, essentialism and utopianism, thus, it is hoped, paving the way for a future revolution, the time of which awaits the announcement of critical intellectuals (137). Readers will find a comprehensive treatment of Foucault's conceptual emphases and the book is well organised. At the same time, since the project is defined in terms of an explication of a consistent ontology in Foucault subtending his approach to the political, Kelly purposely and unfortunately eschews any critical inspection of Foucault (4).

The introduction usefully situates the stakes of the author's intervention for appreciating Foucault's consistency. This is then extended in Chapter 1, dealing with Foucault's epistemology, usefully arguing against the view that Foucault is a relativist (20-21). Suggestive parallels with Althusserian materialism are also discussed although surprisingly lacking any mention of *Reading Capital* (Althusser and Balibar 1970) in which Althusser, drawing on Foucault, lays out a materialist account of knowledge production, together with his concept of "problematic," a development endorsed by Deleuze (1994: 186). Chapters 2 and 3 deal with the concept of power, stressing the Nietzschean (and ultimately romantic) ontology of power relations that are then subsequently expressed in discourse.

Kelly also challenges the notion that Foucault's shift away from the model of war around 1978, to that of games, thereby implies a change of his problematic (56). However, the two chapters on power fail to adequately distinguish between government, governmentality and governing, leading to a rather thin explication of the concept of government (e.g., 68). In this regard, some engagement with Rose's seminal

Powers of Freedom (1999) would have helped the author avoid conflating power and action. Many Foucauldians will likely find Kelly's claim that power is intentionally exercised by persons (65-66; 71), even "consciously or unconsciously" (69) unpersuasive. The same holds for Kelly's suggesting parallels between Foucault and Hegel (170), a position that undermines the author's claims about the importance of anti-subjectivism in Foucault (and Althusser for that matter). These errors affect Kelly's interpretation of "strategy," taken to mean the aims of powerful people (71) whereas for Foucault, aims/goals are matters of policy programmes (Foucault 2000: 385).

Chapter 4, on subjectivity, provides an excellent exegesis of Foucault's concepts of the subject, subjectivity, subjectification and subjectivation that should clear up a great deal of confusion about them. A treatment of the ontological dependence of subjectivity on the materiality of thought, instead of contending that different practices produce different subjects (91) would have strengthened Kelly's explication. The chapter contains a helpful reconstruction of the Foucauldian argument against identity politics (103) and a persuasive discussion of the difference between Foucault and Butler, challenging the latter's tautological conception of power and agency.

The fifth chapter on resistance is the least satisfying even with its correct disarticulation of resistance as practice from resistance as inherent in the ontology of power, and from the notion that resistance is a practice to be derived from an a priori normative rule. Chapters 6 and 7 on critique and ethics, are the strongest in the book. Critique is shown to provide the normative basis for challenging macro-violence and hence resisting for others (133-134), a practice based on creating "space in which new ways of thinking can emerge" (142). We also finally get an admission that Foucault repudiates politics (127). Kelly also provides an excellent critique of the conservative implications of Rorty (135). The final chapter on ethics distills the argument that ethics is a matter of personal interventions at the micro-level, "choosing what to combat, not what to endorse (150), while extending and democratising "art" (155). The book is to be lauded for its scope and for having systematically laid out a template for approaching Foucault's political thought in a comprehensive way and providing a map of the contemporary intertextual milieu in which such questions are addressed.

Significant theoretical questions however, are underdeveloped in the book. For instance, on the metatheoretical front, Kelly rightly stresses Foucault's frequently overlooked realist and materialist ontology (e.g., 21, 22, 29, 86; see Pearce and Woodiwiss 2001) but for this, the author needs a more elaborate examination of the tension between realism and nominalism in Foucault (e.g., 142). In this regard, readers will find Rachjman (1985) and Veyne (1997) more pertinent. The fundamental limitation of the book is that it fails to deal with the question of what kind of political philosophy explicitly repudiates "politics", denouncing the development of programmes for an alternative society (Foucault 1980: 230-231; see also 2003: 54)? Indeed, as Kelly stresses, "Not only is political planning unhelpful to resistance, but it actively helps the formation of new structures and strategies of power" (136) leading to the conclusion that we should "never do politics" (Foucault cited on 162). It is difficult not to come to the conclusion that the book then is fundamentally an uncritical apologetic for Foucauldian anti-politics and for that, fundamentalist itself in its theoretical and practical judgments. This sentiment draws support from an unrecognisable account of Marxism, claiming that it has no positive content (159), thus neglecting that the positive content for Marxism concerns the democratic governance of all facets of social life (see Poulantzas 1978). Indeed, in contrast to Foucault, Marxism is not about resistance, but about transforming the conditions that undermine the capacity of the vast majority of people to have the power to democratically determine their fates. Most pertinently, whether or not Foucault presents a persuasive alternative to transformative politics (e.g., Marxism) is thus not a matter for which Kelly's book is adequate as a resource.

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