# foucault studies

STATE OF THE DISCIPLINES

# Foucault and Theology

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## Theological Appropriations of Foucault

From its emergence in the mid-1980s, theological engagement with the thought of Michel Foucault – taking place within the Christian tradition – has followed three principal trajectories, reflecting developments in Foucault scholarship as well as wider critical debates, and variously negotiating the relationship that might be established between Foucault's thought and theology. Sharon Welch inaugurated the first of these trajectories in 1985, when, taking up the broader examination of the implications of Foucault's analyses of 'power-knowledge' then current in Foucault studies, she utilised these analyses toward the construction of a feminist theology of liberation.[1] Subsequently, a number of theologians explored further the critical possibilities associated with 'power-knowledge' for theologies of liberation,[2] scriptural hermeneutics,[3] and practical theology (drawing upon Foucault's

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1    See Sharon D. Welch, *Communities of Resistance and Solidarity: A Feminist Theology of Liberation*. (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis, 1985). Even earlier is the influence of Foucault's work upon the broader study of religion in Bryan S. Turner, *Religion and Social Theory* (London: Sage, 1983). Following Foucault, Turner shifts the emphasis in the study of religion from "ideology" to the "body" and, hence, to a "materialistic" approach to religion (p. 2).

2    See Marc P. Lalonde, "Power/Knowledge and Liberation: Foucault as a Parabolic Thinker", *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 61:1 (1993), 81-100; Daniel N. Hopkins, "Postmodernity, Black Theology of Liberation and the U.S.A.: Michel Foucault and James H. Cone", in David B. Batstone et al., eds., *Liberation Theologies, Postmodernity and the Americas* (London & New York: Routledge, 1997), 205-221. See also Mary McClintock Fulkerson, *Changing the Subject: Women's Discourses and Feminist Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1994), in which a poststructuralist feminist theology is elaborated, drawing in part upon Foucault.

3    See Elizabeth A. Castelli, *Imitating Paul: A Discourse of Power* (Louisville and Westminster: John Knox Press, 1991); idem., "Interpretations of Power in 1 Corinthians", *Semeia* 54 (1992) 199-222, reprinted in James Bernauer and Jeremy Carrette, eds., *Michel Foucault and Theology: The Politics of Religious Experience* (London: Ashgate, 2004), 19-38; Stephen D. Moore, *God's Gym: Divine Male Bodies of the Bible*

analyses of "pastoral power", in particular),[4] while these analyses were also applied to the broader study of religion.[5] With these utilisations of his thought, a pattern was established of applying certain of Foucault's critical tools and conceptualisations to a variety of theological questions – a pattern, which would be expanded as more points of contact between his work and theology came to light, with his later work explored for its contribution to scholarly understanding of early Christian writings,[6] his ethics for its import for moral theology,[7] and his genealogical histories for its effect upon the theology of tradition,[8] to name just some of these recent engagements with his work.[9]

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(London and New York: Routledge, 1996). For an earlier version of some of this material see Moore, *Poststructuralism and the New Testament: Derrida and Foucault at the Foot of the Cross* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1994). See also, Heather A., McKay, "She Said to Him, He Said to Her: Power Talk in the Bible or Foucault Listens at the Keyhole", *Biblical Theology Bulletin* 28:2 (1998), 45-51. Another theological application of Foucault's analyses of power is to be found in Kyle A. Pasework, *A Theology of Power: Being Beyond Domination* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993).

4    See *Wege zum Menschen* 47 (1995) with the following articles: Eva Erdmann, "Die Macht unserer Kirchenväter. Über 'die Geständnisse des Fleisches'", 53-60; M Weimer, "Das Verdrängte in der Hirtenmetaphor. Kritische Reflexionen zu Foucaults Begriff des 'Pastorats'", 61-76; N. Mette, "'Pastoral Macht'. Praktisch-theologische Anmerkungen zu einem Theorem M. Foucaults", 76-83; Hermann Steinkamp, "Die 'Seele' – 'Illusion der Theologen'. Michel Foucaults Bestimmung der 'Seele' an die Seelsorge", 84-93; Susan .J. Dunlap, *Counselling Depressed Women: Counselling and Pastoral Theology* (Westminster: John Knox Press 1998), which draws on Foucault's theory of power; Hermann Steinkamp, *Die sanfte Macht der Hirten. Die Bedeutung Michel Foucaults fur die praktische Theologie* (Mainz: Grünewald, 1999). A further recent application of Foucault's thought to practical theology, which shifts the emphasis from his analysis of power to that of subjectivity, is that of Claudia Kolf-van Melis, *Tod des Subjeks? Praktische Theologie in Auseinandersetzung mit Michel Foucaults Subjetkritik* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2003).

5    In addition to the work of Bryan Turner cited in note 1, the influence of Foucault upon the study of religion is to be found in David Chidester, "Michel Foucault and the Study of Religion", *Religious Studies Review* 12:1 (1986), 1-9; Catherine Bell, *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice* (New York: Oxford, 1992); Talal Asad, *Genealogies of Religion* (Baltimore: Maryland: John Hopkins University Press, 1993).

6    Elizabeth A. Clark, "Foucault, the Fathers, and Sex", *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 56 (1998), 619-641, reprinted in Bernauer and Carrette, eds., *Michel Foucault and Theology*, 39-56; John Behr, "Shifting Sands: Foucault, Brown and the Framework of Christian Asceticism", *The Heythrop Journal* 34:1 (1993), 1-21.

7    Marcus Pfannkuchen, *Archäologie der Moral. Zur Relevanz von Michel Foucault für die theologische Ethik* (Münster: LIT, 2000).

8    James M. Byrne, "Foucault on Continuity: The Postmodern Challenge to Tradition", *Faith and Philosophy* 9:3 (1992), 335-352.

9    In addition see Stephen A. Ray, *The Modern Soul: Michel Foucault and the Theological Discourse of Gordon Kaufman and David Tracy* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987); Grace Jantzen, *Power, Gender and Christian Mysticism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995); David O'Toole, *Waiting for Godot in Sarajevo: Theological Reflections on*

These readings open up important perspectives upon the challenges and possibilities of Foucault's thought for theological knowledge and constitute valuable projects in their own right – as when Elizabeth Castelli demonstrates the power relations inaugurated by St. Paul's call to the early churches to imitate his apostolic example, or when Grace Jantzen develops a critical, gendered genealogy of Christian mysticism.[10] However, as theological engagements with Foucault, their abstraction of aspects of his work from his larger project risks distorting the wider strategic intentions of his analyses, as Stephen Carr illustrates in relation to Welch's deployment of Foucault's notion of power within a Habermasian and Rortyian pragmatics of truth.[11] Conversely, their application of components of his thought to predefined theological questions tends to circumscribe the potential impact of his thought upon theology.[12]

## Foucault And Postmodern Theology

It is not surprising, therefore, that such applications of Foucault's thought have remained for the most part isolated within their respective disciplines, and that the question of the extent of the significance for and compatibility

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*Nihilism, Tragedy, and Apocalypse* (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1998) which develops a metaphysics of tragedy from the work of Foucault and Nietzsche as a basis of its theological reflection; Thomas M. Beaudoin, "I Was Imprisoned by Subjectivity and You Visited Me: Bonhoeffer and Foucault on the Way to a Postmodern Christian Self", *Currents in Theology* 29:5 (2002), 341-361; idem., "Foucault-Teaching-Theology", *Religious Education* 98:1 (2003), 25-42; Vincent Miller, *Consuming Religion: Christian Faith and Practice in a Consumer Culture* (New York: Continuum, 2003); Karlheinz Ruhstorfer, *Konversionen: Eine theologische Archäologie der Bestimmung des Menschen bei Foucault, Nietzsche, Augustine und Paulus* (Paderborn: Schöningh, 2003).

10    Castelli, *Imitating Paul: A Discourse of Power*; Jantzen, *Power, Gender and Christian Mysticism*.

11    See Stephen Carr, 'Foucault Amongst The Theologians', *Sophia* 40.2 (2001) 31-45, at 38.

12    The recent work of Claudia Kolf-van Melis is instructive here. She pursues a dialogue, on the question of subjectivity, between Foucault's thought and the theology of the twentieth-century Catholic theologian Karl Rahner. While she argues that Foucault's treatment of the question is incompatible with the 'transcendental subjectivity' underpinning Rahner's 'dogmatic' or 'systematic' theology, and excludes the possibility of dialogue in this sphere, she nonetheless pursues a comparison – quite productive on its own terms – between Foucault's notion of 'care of the self' and Rahner's less technical treatment of subjectivity within the sphere of practical theology. The effect of this move, however, is that, where Foucault's treatment of subjectivity might be expected to bring the 'practical' to bear upon and complicate theology's theoretical or 'systematic' viewpoint, Kolf-van Melis's restriction of engagement with Foucault's work to a 'practical' register reinforces the divisions within theological discourse which tend to separate the practical and the theoretical. See Kolf-van Melis, *Tod des Subjekts?*, 267ff.

with theology of Foucault's thought has been more widely and acutely addressed within a second 'postmodern' trajectory of engagement with his thought. As broader critical debates concerning postmodernism impacted upon theology in the 1990s, theological investigation of Foucault's thought was filtered through the question of the extent to which there can or ought to be a 'postmodern theology'. Here Foucault's thought, along with that of Derrida, Lyotard and others, was typically understood as representative of a wider 'post-modernism', which, in championing 'multiplicity' and 'difference', displaces and succeeds modernity. Consequently, its theological significance has typically been determined according to three familiar attitudes to postmodernism thus conceived.

Firstly, his thought has been drawn upon by what may be described as the theologies of "dissolution" of Mark C. Taylor and others, which embrace the postmodern as ushering in a post-modern and post-Christian age, with which theology must come to terms, and which opens up, in the ruins of modernity, new possibilities of (post)theological thought.[13] An important instance of this approach is provided by Johannes Hoff, who embraces the 'destructive' element of the thought of Foucault and Derrida, but stresses their ultimate "de*con*structive" intent: their destruction of false stabilities and identities constituting a constructive engagement with the aporiae and discontinuities of human language and thought.[14] Secondly, and by contrast, traditional ecclesial theologies have typically concluded that, while Foucault offers valuable insights which might be integrated into existing philosophical and theological frameworks, on its own terms his work is ultimately prone to the relativism that undermines radical postmodernism.[15] Consequently, in these circles, theological appropriation of Foucault's work has been rather more circumspect. As Saskia Wendel has recently articulated it, one can have

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13    Terrence Tilley et al., *Postmodern Theologies: The Challenge of Religious Diversity* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis, 1995), viii, 41ff.

14    Johannes Hoff, *Spiritualität und Sprachverlust: Theologie nach Foucault und Derrida* (Paderborn: Schöningh, 1999), 18.

15    See Stanley Grenz, *A Primer on Postmodernism* (Grand Rapids, Michigan and Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdemans Publishing, 1996). Paul Lakeland, *Postmodernity: Christian Identity in a Fragmented Age* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997); Anthony Thiselton, *Interpreting God and the Postmodern Self: On Meaning, Manipulation and Promise* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1995). Having achieved a significant degree of rapprochement with modern thought, these theologies are typically more at home with 'late modern' projects, such as that of Jürgen Habermas, which seek to reform and extend the modern project, than those which appear to radically critique it. See, for example, Don S. Browning and Francis Schüssler Fiorenza, eds., *Habermas, Modernity and Public Theology* (New York: Crossroad, 1992).

a theology which "takes up his questions, his criticisms, his analyses", but such a theology "cannot affirmatively adopt Foucault's perspective".[16]

Thirdly, the emergence of the "radical orthodoxy" movement in the theologies of John Milbank, Graham Ward and others has given this 'postmodern' approach a new and more apologetic twist. For these theologians, Foucault's thought shares with postmodernism in general the merit of enabling theology to free itself from the tyranny of modernity. Nonetheless, it is representative of a postmodern nihilism *against which* theology must articulate its own proper identity.[17] An important difference in emphasis between Milbank and Ward is noteworthy here. For, while Milbank trenchantly argues that Foucault and other 'postmodern' thinkers purvey an "ontology of violence" entirely incompatible with Christian thought, Ward is increasingly sensitive to the degree to which contemporary theology is dependent for its form upon other discourses.[18] In this regard, Ward approaches at least some way toward the more positive attitude of narrative theologian Stanley Hauerwas who understands Foucault – by contrast with many other postmoderns – as offering to theology a constructive challenge: that theologians might do for theology what Foucault has done for thought in general.[19] Nonetheless, even in this more positive appraisal a clear distinction is maintained: Foucault may contribute to shaping the external form of theology, but his critical challenge cannot be allowed to affect the core of its self-understanding.

In its various forms, this second, postmodern trajectory, therefore, brings to the fore the question of the extent to which there can be or ought to be a theology 'after' Foucault. In particular, it highlights how 'ecclesial'

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16   See Saskia Wendel, "Foucault und/oder Theologie? Chancen und Gefahren einer theologischen Rezeption der Philosophie Michel Foucaults", in C. Bauer and M. Hölzl, eds., *Gottes und des Menschen Tod? Die Theologie vor der Herausforderung Michel Foucaults* (Mainz, Grünewald, 2003), 51-65 at 58. A similar evaluation is found in several other contributions to this volume.

17   See John Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory: Beyond Secular Reason* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990), 278ff; Graham Ward, "Kulturkritik im Dienste der Theologie. Ein Vergleich zwischen Michel Foucault und Pierre Bourdieu", trans. Michael Hölzl, in Bauer and Hölzl, eds., *Gottes und des Menschen Tod?*, 129-141. In addition, within Catholic thought see the recent encyclical, Pope John Paul II, *Fides et Ratio* (London: Catholic Truth Society, 1998), n.91 which links postmodernity with nihilism, though it is less trenchant in its attitude than radical orthodoxy.

18   See, for instance, Ward, *Cultural Transformation and Religious Practice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), especially 115, where Ward argues that although there is no general hermeneutics within which Christianity might be located, nonetheless it does not have a pure form. Rather, its "identity is always constituted only *in relation to*."

19   Stanley Hauerwas, "The Christian Difference, or Surviving Postmodernism", in Graham Ward, ed., *The Blackwell Companion to Postmodern Theology* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001), 145-161.

theologies increasingly confront the challenge of Foucault's thought for theology with their own concern to articulate, against the legacy of modern foundationalism, a "theological theology" that "springs from its own proper sources", rather than having its foundation in 'secular' concepts such as 'liberation'.[20] The critical question these theologies pose concerns how to engage with Foucault without installing his thought as a new philosophical 'foundation' – thereby diluting its own proper identity. However, the ultimate difficulty for this approach, as Gavin Hyman has demonstrated, is that the conception of the postmodern invoked across each of these readings tends to repeat the apologetic dichotomy between theology and philosophy prevalent in modern thought.[21] By interpreting the postmodern as sharply post-modern, thought is confronted with a direct choice between a modern and a postmodern mode of thought, and in turn, theology is confronted with a choice for or against a 'postmodern theology'. Consequently, one can have a theology which preserves its identity against Foucault's 'dangerous' project, appropriating only that which can be safely integrated within its existing worldview, or one can have a thoroughly Foucauldian theology. This dilemma allows little room for investigation of the extent to which Foucault's thought might inform or disrupt theology's self-understanding, nor for how theology might welcome and *negotiate* the challenge of his thought beyond ascribing to or rejecting it.[22]

Moreover, as postmodern categories lose something of their analytic power in contemporary discourse, it is increasingly doubtful that Foucault's thought can be adequately construed as postmodern.[23] In any case, as David

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20 Walter Kasper, "Postmodern Dogmatics: Toward a Renewed Discussion of Foundations in North America", *Communio* 17 (Summer 1990), 181-191, at 191.

21 Gavin Hyman, *The Predicament of Postmodern Theology: Radical Orthodoxy or Nihilist Textualism?* (Louisville and London: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001).

22 Wendel offers a telling instance of this, when she reveals that the reason that theology cannot adopt Foucault's perspective is that his 'postfoundational' philosophy does not provide any secure 'ground', be it a philosophy of the human subject or of freedom, upon which theological knowledge might be articulated. As such, she implicitly assumes that a certain kind of philosophy is necessary for theological thought and, therefore, cannot engage with Foucault's whole rethinking of these categories in his pursuit of the 'history of the present'. Wendel, "Foucault und/oder Theologie?", 58. See also Thomas G. Guarino, '*Fides et Ratio*: Theology and Contemporary Pluralism', *Theological Studies* 62:4 (2001), 675-700, at 693-695. Guarino makes the point that in judging postmodernism's postmetaphysical as tending toward nihilism, the Catholic encyclical of Pope John Paul II, *Fides et Ratio*, fails to allow for the possibility that so-called 'postmodern' thinkers might be constructively engaging with contemporary philosophical issues.

23 See, for example, Frank Palmeri, "Other Than Postmodern? Foucault, Pynchon, Hybridity, Ethics", *Postmodern Culture* 12:1 (2001); online journal available at http://jefferson.village.virginia.edu/pmc/text-only/issue.901/12.1palmeri.txt, accessed on 19/01/05. Palmeri argues that rather than being 'postmodern', Foucault is best

Couzens Hoy already argued in 1988, if Foucault's thought is postmodern, it is so in a manner such that "[t]he same person, discipline, or institution can be traditional in some respects, modern in others, and postmodern in yet others."[24] As such, Foucault does not argue for a total or definitive historical break which would inaugurate a postmodern era, and the dilemma of choosing or rejecting the postmodern, and of the alternative of theology cautiously appropriating aspects of Foucault's work or a Foucauldian theology is a false one within the perspective of Foucault's own thought.

In part, the limitations of each of these first two trajectories of theological engagement with Foucault – application of his thought to theological questions and a postmodern reading of his work – can be traced to a number of historical factors. Firstly, during much of the 1990s, the phenomenological focus of the debate generated by the "theological turn" in continental philosophy served to obscure the possible points of intersection between Foucault's more 'genealogical' project and theology.[25] It has only been in recent years, as the intense engagements between thinkers like Derrida and Jean-Luc Marion have played out, that the exploration of the 'theological' importance of the work of a wider group of 'poststructuralist' thinkers has been investigated.[26] Equally, it has only been with the publication of Foucault's *Dits et écrits* in 1994 that the full scope of Foucault's project could begin to be appreciated.[27] In particular, his sustained re-

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described as 'other than postmodern', aiming at a "non-modern" critique concerned with, and imagining more possibilities for ethics and politics than postmodernism allows (paragraph 15ff). Also see, Foucault, "Structuralisme et poststructuralisme", in DE II, 1250, 1265-66, where Foucault distances himself from postmodernism.

24   David Couzens Hoy, "Foucault: Modern or Postmodern?", in Jonathon Arac, ed., *After Foucault: Humanistic Knowledge and Postmodern Challenges* (New Brunswick and London: Rutgers University Press, 1988), 12-41, at 38.

25   Arthur Bradley, "Thinking the Outside: Foucault, Derrida and Negative Theology", *Textual Practice* 16.1 (Spring 2002), 57-74; idem., *Negative Theology and Modern French Philosophy* (London and New York: Routledge, 2004). Bradley's article reflects a tendency to read Foucault through the lens of the kind of (post)phenomenological debate pursued by Derrida, Marion and others, and on these terms to find his engagement with theological questions wanting. By contrast, while Bradley's later book continues to be informed by this debate, Foucault's work is presented as concerned with rather different questions and a rather different project.

26   A typical debate between Derrida and Marion is found in John D. Caputo and Michael J. Scanlon, eds., *God, the Gift and Postmodernism* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1999). For a wider engagement with 'postmodern' or 'poststructuralist' thinkers, see, for example, Ward, ed., *The Postmodern God: A Theological Reader*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1997); Frederick C. Bauerschmidt, "The Abrahamic Voyage: Michel de Certeau and Theology", *Modern Theology* 12.1 (1996), 1-26; Mary Bryden, ed., *Deleuze and Religion* (London: Routledge, 2001).

27   Foucault, *Dits et Écrits, 1954-1988*. Ed. Daniel Defert and François Ewald, 4 volumes (Paris Gallimard, 1994.); 2 Volumes (Paris: Quarto Gallimard, 2001). See Arnold I.

working of the *History of Sexuality* series has meant that the ethical focus and direction of his later work has often to be reconstructed from these essays, lectures and interviews.[28] The situation has been even more acute in relation to his treatment of early Christian writings as the final volume of Foucault's *History of Sexuality* bringing to fruition his work on "the confession of the flesh" in early Christian practices has famously remained unpublished.[29]

## A Third Trajectory: James Bernauer And Jeremy Carrette

A third trajectory of exploration of the theological significance of Foucault's thought has emerged in recent years and takes up the two-fold challenge and opportunity of the situation brought about by these developments: to engage with Foucault's thought as an original and substantial, ethical project and to examine precisely how this project intersects with theological discourse. More accurately, this challenge had already been anticipated to a considerable extent by the philosopher James Bernauer, who attended Foucault's lectures at the *Collège de France* in the late 1970s. As early as 1987, Bernauer had proposed that Foucault's thought might be conceived of as a "negative theology".[30] In 1988, he co-edited a volume exploring the work of the "final Foucault", which made available a substantial bibliography of Foucault's works, compiled with Thomas Keenan.[31] In turn, a comprehensive 1990 study of Foucault's thought brought together in synthesis a sustained ethical interpretation of his work with Bernauer's claim concerning Foucault's "negative theology".[32] More recently, Jeremy Carrette, working in the field of

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Davidson, "Structures and Strategies of a Discourse: Remarks Towards a History of Foucault's Philosophy of Language" in Davidson, ed., *Foucault and His Interlocuters* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997), 1. Davidson announces how with the publication of these texts, "we are in a new position to begin to assess the significance of his work".

28   See, for example, Jeremy Moss, ed., *The Later Foucault: Politics and Philosophy* (Thousand Oaks, California: Sage, 1998); Alexander Nehamas, *The Art of Living: Socratic Reflections from Plato to Foucault*. Sather Classical Lectures, 61 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998); Timothy O'Leary, *Foucault and the Art of Ethics* (London and New York: Continuum, 2002).

29   Publication of this work has been considered to be ruled out by Foucault's prohibition on posthumous publications. However, the recent comments by Daniel Defert, cited Elden, "Review. Bernauer and Carrette, eds., *Michel Foucault and Theology*", *Foucault Studies* 1 (Dec 2004), 114, suggest that, in addition, the work is in a less developed state than had previously been thought.

30   James W. Bernauer, "The Prisons of Man: An Introduction to Foucault's Negative Theology." *International Philosophical Quarterly* 27 (1987), 365-380.

31   James W. Bernauer, and David Rasmussen, eds., *The Final Foucault* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1988), See Bernauer, and Keenan, T., "The Works of Michel Foucault, 1954-1984", 119-158.

32   Bernauer, *Michel Foucault's Force of Flight: Toward an Ethics of Thought* (London: Humanities Press International, 1990).

religious studies and building upon the *Dits et écrits* texts, as well as further archival research, has complemented Bernauer's earlier studies by tracing in detail Foucault's engagement with theological themes throughout the course of his work – what he terms the "religious subtext" of his thought. In addition, he has published, in English translation, a selection of Foucault's essays and other writings, which bear upon the relation of religion and culture.[33] However, aspects of Carrette's reading of Foucault are in tension with those of Bernauer, not least his assertion that Foucault's thought constitutes a negative theology. The dialogue between their projects has culminated in a co-edited volume, which seeks to bring the Foucault of this "second wave" of reading of his work into dialogue with mainstream theology, and sets the agenda for theological engagement with Foucault going forward.[34]

Against misunderstandings of Foucault's project, Bernauer's 1990 study pays close attention to its paths, motivations and intensities, characterising "that thought's fundamental experience of itself" as a coherent and unrelenting ethical "force of flight" beyond the imprisonments of modern society. Thus, beginning with Foucault's early psychological interrogation of 'man', within the framework of a Heideggerian phenomenology, Bernauer figures Foucault as adopting successive paradigms of thought, only, as it were, to think each one through to its limits – thereby revealing its contingent conditions of emergence and 'negating' its scientific claims. Thus, Foucault's broadly Heideggerian approach collapses under the weight of the experience of thinking the 'silence' of a madness excluded by reason. Foucault's encounter with the limits of the thinkable, and its relation of dependence to an 'unthought', leads to what Bernauer describes as the "cathartic" research of *The Order of Things*, which seeks to "comprehend and purge the epistemic conditions determining the major principles of current knowledge in the human sciences", in their relation to their subject and object, 'man'.[35] In turn, Bernauer traces how, sensing the instability of this recent creation, Foucault articulates in the late 1960s his own "dissonant" archaeological method, and how this transposes, in the 1970s, into a "dissident" investigation of politics, power, and power's production of subjects and what counts as true. Finally,

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33  Jeremy R. Carrette, *Foucault and Religion: Spiritual Corporality and Political Spirituality* (London and New York: Routledge, 2000). Michel Foucault, *Religion and Culture*, ed. Jeremy Carrette (New York: Routledge, 1999), 11-17.

34  Bernauer and Carrette, eds., *Michel Foucault and Theology: The Politics of Religious Experience* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004). My treatment of this collection focuses upon its development of the researches inaugurated by Bernauer and Carrette. For a wider perspective, see Stuart Elden's review in *Foucault Studies* 1 (Dec. 2004), 114-115. Elden gives particular mention to Thomas Beaudoin article, "From Singular to Plural Domains of Theological Knowledge: Notes Toward a New Foucaultian Question", 171-190.

35  Bernauer, *Foucault's Force of Flight*, 5.

with Foucault's recognition after 1976 that his own emphasis on power had tended to obscure the possibilities of resistance and freedom, there emerges a "final and culminating stage in Foucault's development": an "ecstatic" thinking, which, without returning to the modern subject, explores the genealogy of the desiring subject and, in particular, future ethical modes of thought and spaces of freedom.

Crucially, for Bernauer, in this final phase, Foucault's thought most clearly reveals its inner impulse as a "worldly mysticism" and a "cry of spirit" that continually seeks freedom from the imprisonments and normalising power of modern society.[36] Its continual discernment of, and movement beyond, the limits of our finite constructions of truth, achieved in "ascetic" practices of self and thought, suggest, for Bernauer, that Foucault's thought constitutes a negative theology. This claim is not, he argues, an arbitrary one on his part. He points out that Foucault had suggested, in a 1967 interview, that the tension in his work in the 1960s had been between his passion for the work of writers like Blanchot and Bataille, on the one hand, and the structuralist analyses of Dumézil and Lévi-Strauss, on the other. The common denominator for both these interests, Foucault suggested, was "the religious problem", allowing him to recognise that "structure, the very possibility of a rigorous discourse on structure, leads to a negative discourse on the subject…similar to Bataille's and Blanchot's".[37] Bernauer connects this statement with the explicit link made by Foucault, in his analysis of Blanchot's "thought of the outside", between his thought and the tradition of negative theology,[38] and, with a comment of Foucault's in a 1980 lecture, that his thought was like a negative theology but in relation to the human sciences

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36      Bernauer, *Foucault's Force of Flight*, 178, 183. Bernauer stresses how Foucault's thought is permeated by notions such as "freeing ourselves from ourselves", re-appropriation of the Enlightenment as an *Ausgang*, and philosophy as a way of life and an *ascesis*. See also, Bernauer, 'Beyond Life and Death: On Foucault's Post-Auschwitz Ethic.' *Philosophy Today* 32 (1988), 128-142.

37      Bernauer, *Foucault's Force of Flight*, 178; Foucault, "Who are you, Professor Foucault? Interview with P. Caruso", in Michel Foucault, *Religion and Culture*, 98.

38      Foucault, "Thought of the Outside", in J.D. Faubian, ed., *Aesthetics: Essential Works of Foucault 1954-1984*. Volume 2 (London: Penguin, 2000), 150. The crucial text reads: "One might assume that ["the thought of the outside"] was born of the mystical thinking that has prowled the confines of Christianity since the texts of Pseudo-Dionysius: perhaps it survived for a millennium or so in the various forms of negative theology. Yet nothing is less certain: although this experience involves going "outside of oneself," this is done ultimately in order to find oneself, to wrap and gather oneself in the dazzling interiority of a thought that is rightfully Being and Speech, in other words, Discourse, even if it is the silence beyond all language and the nothingness beyond all being." It should be noted that Foucault does not clearly distinguish between negative theology and mystical theology in this context, an imprecision often found in his conceptualisations in the religious sphere, though this typically does not vitiate the force of the larger points he is making.

rather than God.[39] He goes on to argue that while Foucault never developed the analogy, his critique of modern anthropocentrism is best described as a negative theology rather than a negative anthropology, for "man" appears precisely in the shadow of and as a response to the death of God.[40] As he put it in his 1987 article, the substitution of the divine 'I am' with the human 'I think' involved a loss of human transcendence insofar as the historical happiness and perfection of the human being became the goal of thought. By contrast, Foucault's thought can be understood as reopening of the possibility of human transcendence in a negative mode.

*Christian Parrhesia*

This analysis alone might suggest that while Foucault's thought is 'negative' in structure, it constitutes a negative *theology* only in a circumscribed sense. However, Bernauer further develops the idea of Foucault's thought as a "cry of *spirit*". He suggests firstly that, at the time of his death, Foucault's ethics of "care of the self" owed more to Christian spirituality than to the pagan practices of the self from which it was ostensibly derived.[41] He was, Bernauer argues, fascinated by and "came to esteem and utilise a Christian style of liberty which combined a care of self with a sacrifice and mortification of that self."[42] Moreover, recently, Bernauer has developed the claim of Foucault's debt to Christian spirituality in a slightly different direction, in an examination of Foucault's final lecture at the *Collège de France*, which treats of "Christian *parrhesia*".[43] Framing his discussion of this material within Foucault's resistance to all forms of fascism, Bernauer suggests that the common factor in all fascisms is "the obedient subject".[44] He argues that Foucault resists the "the blackmail of the enlightenment", which presents itself as a new rationality liberated from what has gone before, to uncover how the post-Reformation period constitutes a kind of christianisation-in-depth, firstly, within a religious "confessional" context of "pastoral power", and, subsequently, within the secular context of modern "governmentality", with its processes of "subjectivation". It is against this production of obedient

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39    Bernauer, *Foucault's Force of Flight*, 178.

40    Bernauer, *Foucault's Force of Flight*, 178-183.

41    Bernauer, "Foreword: A Cry of Spirit", in Michel Foucault, *Religion and Culture*, ed. Jeremy Carrette (New York: Routledge, 1999), 11-17 at 14.

42    Bermauer, "A Cry of Spirit."

43    Bernauer, "Michel Foucault's Philosophy of Religion: An Introduction to the Non-Fascist Life", in Bernauer and Carrette, eds., *Michel Foucault and Theology: The Politics of Religious Experience* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004), 77-97.

44    Bernauer, "Michel Foucault's Philosophy of Religion," 78.

subjects, that Foucault's rehabilitation of *parrhesia* as a mode of truth-telling, fundamentally resistant to "confession", finds its motivation.[45]

Much of Foucault's final lecture course, and part of this last lecture, is taken up with cynic *parrhesia*, in particular with its radical resistance via the *other* life lived by the cynics. Of critical interest to Bernauer, however, is Foucault's analysis of the transposition of this cynic *parrhesia* in early Christian thought and practice. Foucault points out how in New Testament texts parrhesia was, firstly, a quality of the Christian in general, precisely in their unspoken confidence in God, a confidence based upon obedience to God's will. Secondly, it was a quality of the fearless proclamation of the gospel by the apostles. In the subsequent development of Christian parrhesia, Foucault distinguishes an anti-parrhesiastic, and essentially ascetic, pole of Christian thought in which "truth occurs only through the fearful obedience to God and the suspicious examination of oneself through temptations and tests," and parrhesia constitutes "presumption", in the theological sense of the term.[46] The genealogy of the modern christianisation-in-depth can be traced to this pole of Christian thought. Alongside this tendency, and increasingly marginal to it, he discerns a properly parrhesiastic and mystical pole, rooted in confidence in God's love. Bernauer argues that Foucault appreciated that in this latter pole, Christian practice brings a new dimension to parrhesia: "not the political and moral values of the ancient pagan world but rather the power of a courageous openness to mystery."[47] Moreover, he suggests that this Christian parrhesiastic openness to mystery reflects and casts light upon Foucault's own "spirituality of persons", whose freedom resists being objectivised and "is a kind of irrepressibility".[48] In support of this point, he cites a comment by Foucault suggesting that he was not ashamed of his strong Christian background nor, by implication, its influence upon his work, connecting this analysis to the negative theology he had previously ascribed to Foucault.[49] Thus, while Bernauer allows that Foucault is a *worldly* mystic, and does not define Foucault's precise relationship to theology, he nonetheless would seem to suggest that there is a strong, critical consonance between Foucault's thought and theological concerns, such that one can speak of Foucault's "philosophy of religion" as a resource for contemporary theological thought.

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45      Bernauer, "Michel Foucault's Philosophy of Religion," 78-79.

46      Bernauer, "Michel Foucault's Philosophy of Religion," 87.

47      Bernauer, "Michel Foucault's Philosophy of Religion," 91.

48      Bernauer, "Michel Foucault's Philosophy of Religion," 92-93,

49      Bernauer, "Michel Foucault's Philosophy of Religion," 93, citing Foucault Archives, Document 250(7), Discussion of 21 April 1983, with Hubert Dreyfus, Paul Rabinow and others, 11.

*A Catholic Foucault*

The nuances of this Foucault and his relation to theology are reflected, in Bernauer's outline, with Carrette, of a further dimension of Foucault's engagement with theological themes, which warrants further investigation. He and Carrette argue, that Foucault's thinking "holds a distinctively Catholic dimension" in such a manner that Foucault can be understood as engaging with the Christian tradition and critically challenging its disciplinary regime, becoming at once "both guardian and adversary of the Christian faith".[50] However, this influence of Catholicism upon his thought is filtered through Foucault's own concerns, which somewhat distort his perspective on religious questions. Thus, his emphasis upon confession and pastoral power reflects Catholic theological concerns, but the former may have distorted his analysis of Christian sexuality. Moreover, they suggest that his view of sexuality may primarily reflect Foucault's own Catholic experience of sexuality as saturated by sin. Again, the 'visual' quality of his work echoes what David Tracy has called the Catholic "analogical imagination".[51] His vision of the tortured body, at the beginning of *Discipline and Punish*, and of the tortured, 'enfleshed' Christian of early ascetical practices, forcefully bears upon an experience unfortunately not unknown to Christians. However, once more, Foucault does not grasp the full story, for if the body can be the register of sin, it can, within an incarnational worldview, also be the locus of the divine. At the same time, Bernauer and Carrette argue, Foucault's practice of thought does have an appreciation for the finite and limited, which reflects an incarnational style of thought. Finally, they suggest that his re-appropriation of the enlightenment as a certain attitude to the present, as an *ethos*, and his critique mirror, in important respects, the Christian discernment of spirits.

## Jeremy Carrette

Working in the field of religious studies, Jeremy Carrette takes the question of the relation of Foucault's thought to religious themes in a somewhat different direction. Concerned with the reductive appropriations that plague Foucault scholarship, Carrette seeks to attend to the specific ways in which Foucault's work itself engages with religious themes.[52] In particular, he seeks to resist the temptation to fill out the fragmentary traces of a "religious subtext" to Foucault's thought in a full-blown Foucauldian theory of religion. Moreover, while he detects a genuine "religious question" in Foucault's thought, he

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50    Bernauer and Carrette, "Introduction. The Enduring Problem: Foucault, Theology and Culture", in Bernauer and Carrette, eds., *Michel Foucault and Theology*, 1, and for what follows, 5-9.

51    David Tracy, *The Analogical Imagination* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1998).

52    Carrette, *Foucault and Religion*, ix-xi.

argues that it does not support a theological world-view, and considers that the "creative location" of Foucault's thought within the tradition of negative theology is valid only as a secondary "redaction".[53] Bernauer is not mentioned by name here, but his work is clearly within Carrette's sights. Indeed, Carrette will go on to demonstrate how unlike a negative theologian like Pseudo-Dionysius, for whom transcendence operates along a 'vertical' axis, Foucault uncovers and moves beyond the limits of finite discursive formulations 'horizontally', within the space of discourse.[54] Moreover, Carrette emphasises that in comparing his thought to a negative theology Foucault was doing no more than suggesting certain parallels with his style of thought, but not aligning himself with a theological project.[55] It is well to note that Arthur Bradley has made the even stronger point that, in his treatment of Blanchot's "thought of the outside", Foucault juxtaposes negative theology and the thought of the outside only to demonstrate that they could not be more different.[56] Bradley goes on to suggest that what traces of negative theology remain in Foucault's thought do so in spite of his intentions – due to unresolved tensions between the transcendental and historical in his thought.[57]

Constructively, Carrette traces in detail Foucault's engagement, in the 1960s, with such avant-garde thinkers as Blanchot, Bataille, and Roussel, as well as de Sade. In Foucault's analysis, the death of God and man, the return of language and the emergence of sexuality in modernity open a space in which the 'spiritual' or 'religious' come to bear, in a unique manner, upon the body, in what Carrette terms a "spiritual corporality".[58] The sexualised (male) body becomes marked as the site of what Carrette terms a Sadeian 'theological' anger that both protests the limits imposed by a Christian world-view and, aided by a transgressive mode of language, signals the death of God, becoming at the same time the site of God's absence. For Foucault, this intensified experience of the body and sexuality complicates philosophical

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53    Carrette, *Foucault and Religion*, x-xi, 1.

54    Carrette, *Foucault and Religion*, 92 ff.

55    Carrette, "Prologue to a Confession of the Flesh", in Foucault, *Religion and Culture*, 3-4.

56    Bradley, *Negative Theology*, 118.

57    Bradley, *Negative Theology*, 148-149. See Béatrice Han, *Foucault's Critical Project: Between the Transcendental and the Historical* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002), 38-69. See Thomas R. Flynn, "Partially Desacralized Spaces: the Religious Availability of Foucault's Thought", in Bernauer and Carrette, *Michel Foucault and Theology*, 143-156. Flynn suggests that Foucault protests too much the difference between the thought of the outside and negative theology, however, Bradley's argument seems more plausible: that by this act of distancing through comparison Foucault enables his readers to locate and give substance to the 'thought of the outside' in relation to the broader tradition of western thought.

58    Carrette, *Foucault and Religion*, 44-84; for what follows see especially 63-84.

(and theological) discourse, creating possibilities of disruption and a space to think the death of God and 'man'. For Carrette, this "bringing theology into the bedroom", offers an important critique of religious discourse, "contaminating" it, contesting the very possibility of a religious discourse and experience that could avoid being transformed into this new experience of the body, sexuality and language.[59]

While Carrette interprets Foucault as complicating religious discourse, at the same time, he expresses regret that Foucault's "spiritual corporality" never overcomes its dependence on Sadeian models of isolation, distrust and anxiety and so never explores the positive possibilities for an embodied notion of belief that his analysis opens up.[60] Instead, as he shows, Foucault's interest in the 'disciplinary' structures of modern society in his genealogical period in the 1970s, together with his late interest in ethical modes of subjectivity, sees his concern with religious themes shift toward a "political spirituality" – a term Foucault first used in 1978 in relation to the Iranian revolution.[61] Carrette can emphasise how discipline's focus is not upon a direct 'marking' of the body, but with the formation of a 'soul' that is both cause and effect of 'docile bodies' suitable for governance in modern society. Carrette goes on to show how in his analysis of the early Christian injunction toward 'confession of the flesh', Foucault discovers how the 'spiritual' transforms and indeed constitutes the subject and explores spirituality's political efficacy in the production of subjects. Thus, religious experience is politicised by Foucault's thought.[62] However, Carrette recognises the complex trajectory of Foucault's often problematic conceptualisation of early Christian spiritual practices, and importantly suggests that his interest is primarily in the broader technologies of the self of the ancient world and their importance for the modern truth-governance-subjectivity conjunction. (As a consequence, his treatment of Christian spirituality was repeatedly pushed back, to the point of not being completed at the time of his death). By contrast, the central point of Foucault's analysis of Christianity concerns the new relations of

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59    Developing this aspect of Carrette's analysis see the following articles in Bernauer and Carrette, eds., *Michel Foucault and Theology*: Carrette, "Beyond Theology and Sexuality: Foucault, the Self and the Que(e)rying of Monotheistic Truth", 217-232; Mark D. Jordan, "Sodomites and Churchmen: The Theological Invention of Homosexuality", 233-244; Michael Mahon, "Catholic Sex", 245-266. See also, Jordan, *The Silence of Sodom: Homosexuality in Modern Catholicism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002).

60    Carrette, *Foucault and Religion*, 83.

61    Carrette, *Foucault and Religion*, 129ff. See Michel Foucault, "Questions of Method", in Michel Foucault, *Power: Essential Works of Foucault*. Volume 3. Ed. James D. Faubian (New York: The New Press, 2000), 223-233, at 233: most briefly excised from his text: "the will to discover a different way of governing oneself through a differing way of dividing up true and false – that is what I would call 'political spirituality'."

62    Carrette, *Foucault and Religion*, 136.

power it introduces.[63] Hence, while not the focus of his thought, religious experience is implicated in his analysis and has to confront its own power-effects and its relation to modern modes of governance. In this way, Carrette again strikes a significantly different note than Bernauer, maintaining the subtextual status of religion within Foucault's later conception of the practice of thought.

While Foucault never integrates 'spiritual corporality' and 'political spirituality', Carrette can suggest a coherent direction for the critique of religious discourse 'after' Foucault. Religion must be treated as integrated with the culture in which it arises. Its discourse must be radically located socially and historically, and its belief grasped as thoroughly embodied and 'contaminated' by the body and sexuality. In turn, the suffusion of religious discourse (and religious 'silence') with relations of power, its 'micro-politics', and its technologies of the self as techniques of governance must be taken seriously.[64] However, it should be noted that Carrette is not simply providing a Foucauldian critique of religion – although this has radical implications, in its own right, for both religion and theology. For these, subtextual engagements with religious themes on Foucault's part are profoundly integrated into Foucault's cultural analyses and critical practice. Consequently, he argues, religion is shown to have rather more importance in cultural formation and critical thought than has typically been allowed in religious studies. More importantly, he detects the possibility that in the "absence" of religion in the contemporary world, "we are left with questions of how to create new forms of embodied subjectivity through a 'spiritual corporality' and a 'political spirituality'".[65] The critical point is that "[f]rom this 'absence' a new 'religious space' will emerge in its disappearance."[66] In other words, for Carrette, Foucault's thought does not simply provide a critique which might be applied in the study of religion, or to theology, but portrays a kind of post-religious and post-theological space to be construed nonetheless as the 'religious' and theological space available to us in the contemporary context. A phrase from his recent work with Richard King, suggests the force of what Carrette envisions, at least in embryo, here, when it is suggested that what we need today are "spiritual atheisms" for our time.[67]

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63      Carrette, *Foucault and Religion*, 135-136.
64      Carrette, *Foucault and Religion*, 142-151.
65      Carrette, *Foucault and Religion*, 152.
66      Carrette, *Foucault and Religion*, 152.
67      Jeremy Carrette and Richard King, *Selling Spirituality: The Silent Takeover of Religion* (London and New York: Routledge, 2005), 182.

## Convergence: A Foucauldian Spirituality

It is clear in the context of this analysis that the Catholic dimension of Foucault's thought serves, for Carrette, not to highlight Foucault's consonance with a theological world-view, as Bernauer appears to suggest, but constitutes further religious tropes within Foucault's thought, which reinforce his argument for a Foucauldian "political spirituality". However, where the readings of Bernauer and Carrette converge is in their common ascription to the centrality of "spirituality" to Foucault's ethico-political practice, which, in their recent joint work they argue, he understood "as an ensemble of practices that create not the mere consciousness of the subject but the very being of the subject and its paths of understanding."[68] Citing Foucault's comment from the 1978 lecture, "What is critique?", that "one of the first great forms of revolt in the west was mysticism",[69] they stress that this spirituality leads "not to an isolation from the world but rather a critical immersion into it and a refusal of its immutability". While they recognise that mysticism can be problematic conceptually, they suggest that Foucault's intellectual practice can be described as a "mysticism of revolt". In particular, they connect Foucault's thought with the "otherness" and "intensity of [mystical] experience", which limits the claims of all categories, including theological ones, being instead open to "a transformative presence…which pushes the human condition to find new possibilities" and to resist closure.[70]

In particular, they argue that Foucault's thought refuses to separate theology and culture, but reveals to theology its own conditions of knowledge. Foucault invites theologians to recognise that "all appeals to the past are but, paradoxically, an affirmation of the present political desire for knowledge and power about the nature of truth". He returns theology to its history, shifting the focus from doctrinal systems to the pastoral reality and practices of its living community. "His work uncovers and destabilizes the unexamined authority of theological discourse and brings Christianity back to the fragility of human struggle."[71] Theology can be rethought as practice rather than belief. Consequently, they envision that a "Foucauldian spiritual sensibility" can lead to "a way of relating to oneself differently from modern

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68    Bernauer and Carrette, "Foucault, Theology and Culture", 8. It is impossible to determine the relation between the individual authors Bernauer and Carrette, and the compound author 'Bernauer and Carrette'. This programmatic introduction reads at times as a composite piece, with elements of each individual's views juxtaposed rather than integrated. However, their treatment of a Foucauldian spirituality appears a more integrated piece, though capable of a two-fold interpretation – in line with each of their individual projects.

69    Foucault, "What is critique?" in *The Politics of Truth*, ed. Sylvère Lotringer (New York: Semiotext(e), 1997), 74.

70    Bernauer and Carrette, "Foucault, Theology and Culture," 8-9.

71    Bernauer and Carrette, "Foucault, Theology and Culture," 2-4.

subjectivity" and can "create new spiritual communities for us to inhabit", communities, they recognise, which will be in critical tension with traditional faith communities.[72]

## Contraindications

Bernauer's work has given considerable credibility to Foucault's work as a fundamentally ethical project, and, at least, has demonstrated that both in the late 1960s – as, indeed, Blanchot also attests[73] – and the late 1970s, Foucault's thought engages with themes from "negative theology". However, in view of the objections of Carrette and Bradley, the problem for Bernauer is that he is left with the burden of demonstrating, firstly, that in these instances the relationship between Foucault and a negative theology is anything but weakly analogical, given his tangential engagement with these themes, and secondly, whether his thought as a whole is shaped by them. One contraindicative text of Foucault's might be mentioned, in the latter regard. In a 1966 interview, Foucault distinguished between Hegel and Feuerbach, on the one hand, and Nietzsche, on the other, in relation to the question of the death of God. Foucault argued that, with Hegel, reason takes the place of God as the human spirit gradually develops, while, with Feuerbach, the illusion of God is replaced by "Man" who comes to realise his liberty. However, for Nietzsche, with whom Foucault aligns himself, "the death of God signifies the end of metaphysics, but God is not replaced by man, and the space remains empty."[74] Consequently, Foucault would appear to complicate the relation Bernauer asserts between the death of God and of 'man'.

John Ransom goes further, in his discussion of Bernauer's work, to suggest that Foucault would not only resist the description of his thought as a negative theology, but also the notion of a "Foucauldian spirituality". Finding echoes of the vitalism Deleuze ascribes to Foucault in Bernauer's treatment, he suggests that as a specific intellectual Foucault was not motivated by any principle of 'life' – or, one might suggest, human "irrepressibility" – but was concerned with certain concrete expressions of life, or unrealised possibilities, that might be affirmed or rejected.[75] Of course, Foucault himself deployed the

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72    Bernauer and Carrette, "Foucault, Theology and Culture," 8-9.

73    Maurice Blanchot, "Foucault as I Imagine Him", in *Foucault/Blanchot* (New York: Zone Books, 1987), 74.

74    Foucault, "Philosophy and the Death of God", in Foucault, *Religion and Culture*, 85. It might be noted that this interpretation of Nietzsche, as proposing that the place of God remains empty, was first made, and decisively so, by Heidegger. Foucault's interpretation is thus an interesting signal of the importance of Heidegger to his thought. See Martin Heidegger, "Nietzsche's Word: 'God is Dead'" (1943), in *Off the Beaten Track* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 157-199.

75    John Ransom, *Foucault's Discipline: The Politics of Spirituality* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1997), 177-178.

notion of spirituality, but it covered both Christian and pagan practices of the self and thus appeared to have no specifically religious content.[76] In this regard, Karen Vintges makes the criticism that Carrette does not take account of the fact that when Foucault utilises the notion of "spirituality", he is not referring to religion as such, but only to "freedom practices within religion".[77] The implicit difficulty is one to which Carrette himself adverts: how may a subtext of Foucault's thought be foregrounded without distortion.[78] In particular, the problem is that while he accepts that Foucault reduces religious practices to political practices, he nonetheless wants to retain a specifically religious force to these practices, and to suppose that Foucault's thought contains a religious question.[79] In Carrette's own terms, this might be a valid secondary "redaction", but appears to imbue Foucault's notion of spirituality with unwarranted religious connotations. On the other hand, Vintges' criticism may invert the tension in Carrette's position somewhat, for if Foucault is not necessarily concerned with religion as such, neither is it clear that, in the genealogical context of his analyses, he can entirely abstract these practices from their religious contexts. It would seem rather that Derrida's point is apposite here: that that, which returns, returns differently. From this perspective, Foucault is not an Enlightenment enemy of religion, but neither do the traces of the religious that emerge in his thought necessarily constitute a 'religious' space.[80]

A further, complicating perspective on this notion of a Foucauldian spirituality is offered by Michiel Leezenberg, in his fine article on Foucault's engagement with the Iranian revolution in Bernauer's and Carrette's recent volume.[81] Firstly, Leezenberg's article reinforces the point highlighted by Carrette that, although Foucault examines the relation of spirituality and politics in his later writings, his deployment of the specific concept of a "political spirituality" is centred on this period in the late 1970s and linked to Foucault's response to the Iranian revolution – as is the concept of mysticism

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76    See for example, Foucault, "On the Genealogy of Ethics: An Overview of Work in Progress", in *Essential Works of Foucault, 1954-1984*. Volume 1, ed., Paul Rabinow (London: Penguin, 2000), 253-280 at 294.

77    Karen Vintges, "Endorsing Practices of Freedom: Feminism in a Global Perspective", in Dianne Taylor and Karen Vintges, eds., *Feminism and the Final Foucault* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2004), 275-299 at 288.

78    Carrette, *Foucault and Religion*, 2.

79    Carrette, *Foucault and Religion*, 179-180, note 59.

80    Jacques Derrida, "Faith and Knowledge: the Two Sources of 'Religion' at the Limits of Reason Alone", in Derrida and Gianni Vattimo, eds., *Religion* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1998), 1-78. Derrida highlights how he is not an enemy of religion as certain Enlightenment thinkers were understood to be. But at the same time he has an "unreserved taste" for a public and democratic space of thought. (7-8)

81    Michiel Leezenberg, "Power and Political Spirituality: Michel Foucault on the Islamic Revolution in Iran", in Bernauer and Carrette, eds., *Foucault and Theology*, 99-115.

as revolt. Moreover, Leezenberg highlights how this concept proved problematic for Foucault. For the Islamic revolution in Iran against state power, inspired and facilitated by the people's "spirituality", quickly gave way to the violence of a "bloodthirsty government of reactionary clergy."[82] While Foucault distinguishes the two and does not posit a causal connection between them, the problem nonetheless remains as to the value of revolt: hence, his article, "Is it useless to revolt?"

In addition, Foucault felt it necessary to counter the threat of power unleashed in this context, by appeal beyond "universal principles" to "unbreakable law and unbridgeable rights". Leezenberg points out that, while Foucault did not continue to write about the consequences of these events for his thought, this universalist appeal leaves him at odds with his earlier analytic of power. He suggests that this uncomfortable situation arises because there are traces of a domination-resistance dichotomy still at work in Foucault's thought. It seems reasonable to extend Leezenberg's comments by suggesting that the very idea of a "spirituality" or a "mysticism of revolt" reflects this dichotomy, tending as it does toward constituting what Foucault called a moment "outside history".[83] As Leezenberg's analysis suggests, Foucault, at least at first, did not recognise the relations of power already at play in this "spiritual" revolt. If Foucault's later investigation of ancient pagan and Christian writings is informed, at least in part, by this difficulty, then it is arguable that, although he recognises the deep impact of Christian spirituality upon western subjectivity, Foucault's later focus is not upon a specifically religious or mystical "spirituality" as a potential paradigm of his own thought. In any case, theological readings of his work need to be careful of not going beyond Foucault's deployment of the term.

It is beyond the scope of this article to address these questions in any detail. However, a somewhat different construal, to that provided by Bernauer, of Foucault's treatment of Christian *parrhesia* in his final lecture at the *Collège de France* may suggest something of the potential complication of ascribing a religious, mystical or Christian style of "spirituality" to Foucault in light of these later writings.[84] The larger context of Foucault's discussion of Christian parrhesia, as has been noted, is his sustained exploration of cynic parrhesia, in which Foucault clearly finds a practice and "problematisation" of thought in relation to which he can think through several of his own critical concerns. As the course progresses, one of Foucault's concerns is with precisely how this cynic practice, itself marginal in its time and leaving no

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82    Michiel Leezenberg, "Power and Political Spirituality," 110; See Foucault, "Is it useless to revolt?" in Foucault, *Religion and Culture*, 133.

83    Foucault, "Is it Useless to Revolt?", 131.

84    I am very grateful to Professor Bernauer for making available to me the transcripts of these 1984 lectures, prepared in 1990 by Michael Behrent on behalf of Professor James Miller.

canon of writings, might conceivably have constituted part of the genealogy of western truth-telling, and thus constitute an effective "problematisation" of thought within that tradition today. Foucault's treatment of Christian parrhesia occurs within a genealogical sequence of analyses which trace the manner in which cynicism is absorbed into Western thought and yet dynamically transmits certain *parrhesiastic* values.[85] Thus, prior to his analysis of Christian parrhesia, Foucault examines at length how cynic themes emerge and are transformed in the thought of the Stoic Epictetus. And, at least in outline, he projects a history of that transmission and transformation of these themes beyond Christian practices of the self to nineteenth century revolutionary politics and to certain forms of twentieth century art.[86] Thus, although, due to time pressure at the end of this final lecture, Foucault concludes with a treatment of Christian attitudes to parrhesia and, indeed, with the idea that parrhesia survived on the margins of the Christian tradition in mystical practices, caution is in order when discerning in the spirituality of Christian mystical parrhesia an element critical to Foucault's practice of thought.

Moreover, certain of his remarks suggest that Foucault had a more circumspect attitude than Bernauer supposes to Christianity's mystical and parrhesiastic pole. Certainly, he saw in the trembling obedience of the anti-parrhesiastic and ascetical pole of Christian thought the genealogical origin of "pastoral power". And he asserted that where there is obedience, there cannot be parrhesia.[87] However, the relation Foucault proposes between the parrhesiastic and anti-parrhesiastic poles appears to be a complex one. For it is a tension at the heart of the parrhesiastic pole that ultimately gives rise to its anti-parrhesiastic alternative. Foucault had argued that in the New Testament parrhesia signifies confidence in God, but that this confidence is one which asks nothing other than that which God wants, that is, that it depends fundamentally upon the notion that human will is in practice nothing other than the reduplication of God's will. In Foucault's judgment, this circular dynamic of belief follows a principle of obedience.[88] However, he goes on to argue that the positive pole of Christian parrhesia which combines this confidence with the apostolic courage exhibited in proclaiming the

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85    This is not to suggest an underlying parrhesia that persists through history, but rather that a genealogical sequence of concrete historical practices can be seen both to share certain continuities with what has gone before but also to be characterised by contingent historical mutations.

86    Foucault, Lecture of 1 February 1984, 45-51. For the structure and outline of Foucault's final course see, Thomas R. Flynn, "Foucault as Parrhesiast: Last Course at the Collège de France (1984)' in J. Bernauer and T. Ramussen, eds., *The Final Foucault*, 102-118.

87    Foucault, Lecture of 28th March 1984, 52.

88    Foucault, Lecture of 28th March 1984, 38.

gospel, continues to be marked by this principle of obedience. And ultimately, it will only require loss of confidence in the human will's capacity to reduplicate the divine will to open the way to the troubling anti-parrhesiastic 'confession of the flesh'.[89]

Moreover, when Foucault speaks of the survival of parrhesia in the Christian mystical tradition, he refers specifically to the survival of *this* Christian parrhesia of confidence in God. As such, he does not appear to valorise the Christian mystical tradition as preserving and extending the cynic notion of parrhesia, as such, but more modestly of preserving this parrhesia of confidence in and obedience to God.[90] Indeed, when he highlights the manifestation of parrhesia within the Christian tradition, he does not appear to discern any specifically religious or mystical element within it.[91] Reference might also be made here to Bernauer's suggestion that Foucault adopts a Christian form of liberty which combined care and renunciation of self. In light of this final lecture course, it would seem that Foucault also finds in cynic parrhesia a vision of a life in which much is 'renounced' in order to live the true 'other' life, to ethico-political ends in the social sphere. An interesting and important question is how Foucault's Christian and cynic researches intersect on this topic.[92]

Beyond questions of interpretation of his work, Bernauer's and Carrette's arguments for a Foucauldian 'spirituality' raise a broader theological issue, one already raised within the 'postmodern' approach to Foucault. To speak of a Foucauldian 'spirituality' risks a subtle re-inscription of the modern relation of theology and philosophy. For to argue for a Foucauldian 'spirituality' consonant with the Christian tradition as Bernauer appears to do, or to understand Foucault as offering a refigured notion of spirituality as Carrette seems to suggest, is to echo postures from modern and postmodern theology (the latter in turn repeating modern dichotomies). One approaches a situation in which Foucault, on the one hand, can be allowed to shape theological discourse because his work ultimately resonates with its own deepest concerns and traditions, or, on the other, so defines the contemporary space of theological thought, that theology must take his lessons to heart: the alternative of a theological Foucault or a Foucauldian

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89   Foucault, Lecture of 28th March 1984, 45.

90   Foucault, Lecture of 28th March 1984, 54. Foucault suggests that the theme of obedience to God continues within mysticism transformed into the necessity of a purity of soul which makes one worthy to come face-to-face with the divine.

91   See, for example, Foucault, "On the Genealogy of Ethics: An Overview of Work in Progress", 278.

92   In either case caution is required, as Foucault made it clear in relation to the Greek world that he was not interested in their solutions, nor in simply adopting their problematisations, but of taking certain of their problematisations and transforming them so as to bring them to bear on the problems of contemporary thought.

theology. Of course, against this trace in their work and balancing it, both Bernauer and Carrette each brilliantly articulate Foucault's capacity continually to generate profoundly new spaces of theological thought, so that Foucauldian "spirituality" does not simply constitute a modernist critique but continually opens theology to new possibilities.[93] However, an important tension remains, which tends variously to articulate the value of Foucault's thought for theology at the expense of his distance from it.

By contrast, the work of Foucault's contemporary, Michel de Certeau, suggests the outline of an alternative formulation. His thought is framed, on the one hand, by the theological question of how Christianity is thinkable today and, on the other, by a broadly 'poststructuralist' project not entirely dissimilar to that of Foucault. As Bradley has elaborated, de Certeau's thought seeks an answer to his theological question by risking engagement with the otherness of contemporary thought, conceived as irreducible to either 'sameness' or 'difference', such that to engage with it is to risk the certainty that the 'theology' which emerges "is truly Christianity at all" (or, one might add, 'spiritual' or 'religious'), for one has the assurance neither that the other is ultimately of the same order as oneself nor that identity can be secured in giving oneself over to the other.[94] De Certeau's "mundane other" is, rather, at every point an irreducible admixture of both likeness and difference,[95] and applied to Foucault allows for a reading of his work as at a distance in his consonances with and consonant in his distances from theology. Consequently, beyond the apologetic terms of modern thought, theology might be at once shaped by Foucault without becoming Foucauldian, and might constitute a "theological theology" while, at the same time, unable to circumscribe what Derrida might describe as the spectral challenge of Foucault's thought.[96]

## Theologies "After" Foucault

Two recent, constructive theologies 'after' Foucault take up interesting perspectives in relation to the work of Bernauer and Carrette and to these questions. Firstly, J. Joyce Schuld, within the field of "Christian cultural analysis", pursues a sustained conversation between Foucault and Augustine,

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93      Bernauer and Carrette, *Michel Foucault and Theology*, 4.

94      Bradley, *Negative Theology*, 80.

95      See Wlad Godzich, "Foreword: The Further Possibility of Knowledge", in Michel de Certeau, *Heterologies: Discourse on the Other* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986), vii and following, where the term is used to describe de Certeau's notion of the other. A similar theme is found in Deleuze's notion of a repetition producing 'pure', unquantifiable difference, which nonetheless are not absolute.

96      See Derrida, *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning, and the New International*. Trans. Peggy Kamuf (London and New York: Routledge, 1994).

on the basis of the parallels she discovers, on a performative level, between Foucault's notion of power and Augustine's notion of love.[97] Like Bernauer and Carrette, Schuld presents Foucault as an ethical thinker with whom theology can confidently engage, for Foucault's ethos of "being pessimistic without being hopeless", "comports well with much of the Christian tradition."[98] However, at the same time, she preserves a distance between the "Foucault, the atheist" and Christian thought, by a sophisticated cross-reading which aims to explore the resonances and exploit the differences between these two thinkers to the benefit of both of their projects, and without reducing the distinctiveness of their insights and approaches. In particular, she demonstrates how, as relational, dispersed, and productive, Augustinian love demonstrates operative parallels with Foucauldian power, and how love's emphasis upon the personal and power's attention to the social might complement one another to suggest a rich and varied network of relations constitutive of our personal and social space. In this manner, Foucault's and Augustine's respective social and (inter)personal emphases to extend, in a kind of cross-contamination, "the geographic reach" of each other's analyses, Foucault extending Augustine's analysis deeper into the social and political spheres, the latter's notion of love introducing a richer grammar of human relationality – one possessing a "generative" capacity in relation to human possibility that the political heritage of the term 'power' necessarily denies it. In Schuld's view, then, through this cross-reading, Foucault and Augustine can better attend to the complexities and ambiguities of the social and political spheres, and a common commitment to attending to the dangers and vulnerabilities associated with them.

Moreover, while maintaining the distance between their works, Schuld is able to highlight their common elaboration, against the autonomous subject, of what might be termed a vulnerable subjectivity and an associated ethics. A striking comparison of the operative functioning of Augustine's theology of original sin and Foucault's view of world pervaded by power relation enables Schuld to highlight how each thinker delineates a social space in which evil is anonymous and yet permeates its most infinitesimal 'capillaries' and processes.[99] More importantly she shows how both Foucault and Augustine articulate a sense of human agency and responsibility within this social space, responsive to the human vulnerability and moral 'vertigo' experienced within it. Subsequently, this comparison is extended to articulate the parallels and distinctive emphases of each thinker in relation to desire and habit, dominant discourses and politics.

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97     J. Joyce Schuld, *Foucault and Augustine: Reconsidering Power and Love* (Notre Dame, Indiana: Notre Dame University Press, 2003). For a more extensive treatment of Schuld's book, see my review in Foucault Studies 1 (Dec. 2004), 105-110.

98     J. Joyce Schuld, *Foucault and Augustine*, 1-2.

99     J. Joyce Schuld, *Foucault and Augustine*, 47-51.

In all of this, Schuld demonstrates a significant alternative to the approach of Bernauer and Carrette, in that the consonance of Foucault's thought with theological concerns is not at the expense of his distance from theology. Foucault emerges as something approaching de Certeau's "mundane other", whose thought demonstrates an irreducible mix of parallels to and differences from theology. At one point, however, Schuld's approach is rather more problematic. She claims that no "metanarrative pressures" are exerted at the performative level of power and love by Foucault's and Augustine's larger projects: for all of the differences between them, their analyses are ultimately not incompatible.[100] This correlates with Schuld's interpretation, inspired by aspects of the broader American reception of his thought, of Foucault's "specific researches" as "intentionally partial social descriptions" that are "empirical" in nature and "utterly uninterested in all-encompassing interpretations", "bracketing" rather then disqualifying broader questions. This enables her to present Foucault as attending to "forgotten voices" in a manner "suited to detecting and responding to the shifting risks of a post-modern world", while being able to locate his thought as "colourful fragments" within a more "intricate and extensive mosaic".[101] Consequently, Schuld deprives Foucault's thought of a crucial dimension of its critical force, for in her conception, his analyses of power no longer bears upon the "ontological and evaluative center" of Augustine's thought.[102] Nevertheless, her larger "cross-reading" is a sophisticated and promising innovation in theological engagement with Foucault's work.

In turn, Henrique Pinto utilises Foucault's work to construct a theology of interfaith dialogue that moves beyond, what he takes to be, Catholic theology's construction and rejection of other religions as the 'other' of its absolute religious claims.[103] Integrating Foucault's earlier work with his later ethical concerns, Pinto stresses how Foucault continually brings to light how 'truth' stands in a relation to specific contexts and relations of power and hence is always finite, or rather a "finite infinity".[104] He shows how Foucault brings to light how we tend to absolutise truth in a manner inconsistent with its finitude and specificity. Drawing on the deployment of the term in the *Archaeology of Knowledge*, Pinto argues that for Foucault, the very structure of language is that there is always a 'more' that escapes what we intend to say or designate by language. This 'more' is what remains yet to be thought and that which undermines and disrupts our efforts to 'possess' the truth as something

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100    J. Joyce Schuld, *Foucault and Augustine*, 78.
101    J. Joyce Schuld, *Foucault and Augustine*, 8, 17-19.
102    J. Joyce Schuld, *Foucault and Augustine*, 42.
103    H. Pinto, *Foucault, Christianity and Interfaith Dialogue* (London: Routledge, 2003).
104    H. Pinto, *Foucault, Christianity and Interfaith Dialogue*, 4, 39ff.

definitive and absolute.[105] Pinto exploits this term to generate a sophisticated theological reading of Foucault. As he acknowledges, Foucault's 'more' is not the divine. However, in a post-metaphysical context, this recommends a theological interpretation. For 'the *More*', as Pinto writes the term, does not suggest a "region beyond knowledge", nor "something prior to the sentences we speak", nor a God "beyond history in the shadows of its laws."[106] Instead, as the openness or opening of language to the unthought, it is the locus of human-divine relation in history. As such, Pinto can avoid all dualism in speaking of the divine. In a sustained dialogue with the work of such diverse thinkers as Meister Eckhart, Milbank, and Marion, Pinto constructs a model of interfaith dialogue in which the absence of a 'God beyond reality' (which would allow us to absolutise our truth claims) shifts the focus from polemic to a dialogical '*being-with-other-faiths*'. Pinto does not envisage an overcoming of differences but that each tradition would recognise that no religious figure

> is an exhaustive embodiment of the *More* lavishing existence, and that life in relation to them, is not about finding *the* divine hidden in them and conforming to it, but about becoming the *difference* of ourselves through the sacrificial transformation of our theological positions, in response to the demands of the *More* – as we hear it calling in the practice of ourselves and in the making of society.[107]

The creativity of Pinto's reading of Foucault is that he does not have to suggest that Foucault, despite his own intentions, articulated an opening to the theological. There is a perfect consistency, for Pinto, in his own and Foucault's readings of the 'more': Foucault's reading lacks nothing for not recognising the 'more' as the locus of divine-human relations in history, while Pinto's in a sense adds nothing. Its avoidance of dualism also has much to recommend this approach theologically.

However, his interpretation of the 'more' does tend to dissolve the distance between Foucault and theology so carefully articulated here. Where in *The Archaeology of Knowledge* the term refers to the discursive dimension of language beyond words power to name things, Pinto discovers an "untamed exteriority"[108] more reflective of Foucault's explorations of the 'thought of the outside' than his later ethics and echoes contested elements of the notion of a

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105    The term is found in Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (London: Routledge, 2000) 49. While not a central Foucauldian term, the concept does reflect important aspects of Foucault's view of language. For instance, the French title of *The Order of Things* (*Les Mots et Les Choses* (Paris: Gallimard, 1966)) similarly (and ironically) evokes the notion that there is more to language than naming words and designated things.

106    Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, 91.

107    Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, 166.

108    H. Pinto, *Foucault, Christianity and Interfaith Dialogue*, op cit, 91.

Foucauldian spirituality highlighted in relation to Bernauer's and Carrette's work. In particular, that Pinto parallels Foucault's 'more' to Derrida's '*différance*' signals a shift from ascribing importance to particular experiences and specific discursive and power formations to focusing upon the 'openings' of a quasi-transcendentally structured language.[109] The theological importance of this is that, while Pinto does not wish to see religious differences overcome in religious dialogue, this emphasis on the *More* alters the dynamic relation between the particularities of tradition and the 'transcendence' which it enacts, in favour of the latter. Nonetheless, we find here once more – albeit less strongly than in Schuld – the perception of a Foucault at a persistent distance from, yet intersecting with, theology, and an effort to think the resultant admixture of consonance and dissonance.

## Conclusion: Future Lines Of Development

While tracing the evolution of theological engagement with Foucault's thought, this article has concentrated upon Bernauer's and Carrette's critical explorations of the intersection of Foucault's thought with Christian theological themes, as these investigations more than any others have laid the basis for a theological dialogue with his thought. Their recent work, in its achievements and difficulties, highlights how evaluation of the significance of Foucault's deployment of the term 'spirituality', and the extent of its 'religious' and 'mystical' connotations, will be crucial to the dialogue between theology and Foucault going forward. Further exploration of the Catholic dimension of Foucault's thought, highlighted by them, and the ongoing examination of Foucault's later writings will be central to this process. However, the constructive theologies 'after' Foucault of Schuld and Pinto reflect a broader persistent theological intuition of, and caution toward, the distance of Foucault's thought from theology and suggest the need to arrive at a style of theological engagement which allows that difference its proper place. It is perhaps time, therefore, to engage with thinkers like Derrida and de Certeau, who have grappled more explicitly with theoretical questions surrounding the intersection of poststructuralist thought and theology, toward the construction of new paradigms of theological engagement with Foucault's thought. Finally, this article has reflected the fact that theological engagement with the thought of Michel Foucault has essentially taken place within the Christian tradition. However, as Bernauer suggests, Foucault's trips to Japan in 1970 and 1978, and their importance for the development of his understanding of religion, open up the possibility of a dialogue with

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109      See H. Pinto, *Foucault, Christianity and Interfaith Dialogue*, 124-5. The difficulty with focusing on the 'more' is not that it is not a particularly central Foucauldian term, but this shift that it induces.

eastern religions.[110] In addition, Leezenberg's discussion of Foucault's engagement with Islam via the Iranian revolution suggests the possibility of a further expansion of religious dialogue with his work. However, the limits of Foucault's appreciation of the religious dimension of that event, and the apparent limits of his analytic of power as a critical tool to understand it, suggests a difficult though potentially rewarding dialogue.

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110     Bernauer, "Michel Foucault's Philosophy of Religion", 93-94.