

Review of Sophie Fuggle, *Foucault/Paul: Subjects of Power*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013

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Foucault/Paul is not so much a book about the French philosopher, around whom a renewed buzz is taking place (with the thirtieth anniversary of his death), nor is it principally about the apostle Paul. Rather, and this makes it a much more interesting book, Fuggle's is an investigation of power that uses Paul and Foucault as her main conversation partners, along with Giorgio Agamben, Slavoj Žižek and, to a lesser extent, Alain Badiou. It is ultimately a questioning of the role of the intellectual, a reflection on the recent Occupy movement and a proposition concerned with what it means to engage as an academic with the world today. Fuggle's thorough reading of Foucault and Paul aims to make 'a difference', even if it is never certain about what this difference will look like and whether one will truly be able to attain it. But before she gets to such matters, Fuggle takes her reader through a fascinating "parkour"¹ of Paul and Foucault. She proposes to get from one place to another through the most direct and most efficient route (much like the proponents of "parkour"), though in the process makes us see Foucault and Paul in a different way, using her own momentum (her return to power) to propel her and her readers through the works of these two thinkers.

The book is divided in four chapters, preceded by an introduction and a conclusion, that aims to elaborate "our own negotiations with power" and not just map Paul or Foucault's practices on "our own modes of existence" (p. 195). The four chapters are entitled "Excavations," "Between Life and Death," "Power" and "Ethical Subjects." The first chapter, "Excavations," constitutes a history of research around Foucault and Paul, as well as a presentation of the thought of both. The overview of Foucault concerns his entire work. For Paul, the site is inevitably more restricted, focusing on "key engagements with Paul by thinkers whose work is situated in the critical aftermath of Foucault's work on power and poststructuralism in general" (p. 4). Fuggle aims to use Paul to see what (if anything) he can say about now (p. 12). Fuggle's own effort in reconfiguring power has a "practical and not simply theoretical or deferred application" (p. 11).

Her excavations of Foucault are very thorough. Fuggle rightly remarks that power, knowledge and the subject remain important themes in Foucault's thought throughout his entire oeuvre, calling into question those models of criticism that understand him to be abandoning reflections on power as he comes to

¹ Parkour (from the French "parcours") is a type of discipline involving body and mind developed in the wake of Raymond Belle, David Belle and Sébastien Foucan. It is often practiced in urban spaces and involves acrobatic moves, even though it is more about a state of mind than about performance. See for instance, <http://www.parkourgenerations.com/article/le-parkour-overview> (consulted on July 13, 2014).

concentrate more on issues surrounding the self. Fuggle astutely notes that Foucault's investigations of the technologies of the self are also analyses of power; in particular, his understanding of governmentality broadens his sense of the functioning of power and indeed lies at the heart of his treatment of the 'technologies...' and the Hellenistic period. (p. 153).

Fuggle's principle understanding of power comes via Foucault's work on biopower (p. 23). Biopower contributes to the normalisation of the population and, for the individual subject, creates a process of subjection (*assujettissement*) where the individual "is at once subjected to mechanisms of regulation and control, and, in the knowledge that these controls produce, he is transformed into and defined as the individual he already is." (p. 25). Fuggle notes that the hiatus between the publication of *The Will to Knowledge* and the second volume of *The History of Sexuality, The Use of Pleasure*, allows Foucault to adapt his notion of the subject. The "notion of subjection is displaced by the concept of 'subjectivization,'" as Fuggle puts it. However, the subject and how it is produced remain at the heart of Foucault's preoccupations, she says (p. 26). For Fuggle, what preoccupies Foucault in his thinking through of subjectivization is how "an individual produces truth about himself" rather than the ways in which he or she is produced and operated upon by the mores of society.

Fuggle's presentation of Foucault is followed by an exploration of Paul, an exploration that is mostly interested in the way in which Paul reappears in continental philosophy as it grapples with rehabilitating "a left that has become a limping parody of itself" (p. 40). She sets her presentation of Paul in dialogue with philosophers and, perhaps first and foremost, with Nietzsche—through Jacob Taubes' reading of Paul. For Taubes, Paul achieves what Nietzsche was seeking: "the emergence of a new form of life-affirming existence to put an end to slavery and guilt and which, for Paul, occurs as a result of divine grace." (p. 43). It is precisely that which Nietzsche critiques so harshly in Paul that is at the heart of Badiou's and Žižek's appropriations of him, Fuggle argues, namely his "interpretation of the Christ-event." Because Paul dissociates the Christ-event from the historical Jesus, he opens up the possibility for universalism, which is for Badiou a major implication of Pauline thought. Fuggle underlines that a principle problem with Badiou's reading, as has often been noted, is that Badiou extracts Paul's "fidelity to the event and the possibilities opened up by the event from the specific circumstances, context, and meaning of the event itself" (p. 45), as if the fact of the Christ-event had no impact for Paul's fidelity, even though it is hard to see what else we are left with, since, for Paul, the "Christian subject does not preexist the event" (p. 45).

Next, Fuggle discusses Agamben's utilisation of Paul, and remarks that for Agamben Paul functions as an "exception." Fuggle notes in particular that for Agamben the messianic time corresponds to "the state of exception evoked by secular states during a time of war or in 'warlike' circumstances" (p. 47). This interpretation is particularly interesting given Paul's understanding of the law, something that will reappear later in Fuggle's own work. As in the state of exception, Fuggle writes, building on Agamben, "the law achieves its ultimate objectives in the very act that displaces it and renders it powerless" (p. 47). She ends her discussion of the continental philosophers with Žižek, whom she sees as

trying to reconcile “Agamben’s discussion of the state of exception with Badiou’s notion of universality” (p. 49). In these reappropriations by continental philosophers, Paul is freed from the stronghold of biblical exegesis and can be used as a tool against “existing master narratives, methodological frameworks, and discourses of ownership of the apostle” (p. 50).

In her second chapter, “Between Life and Death,” Fuggle works through the relationship between life and death, a relationship that structures both the function and operation of power for Foucault and for Paul (p. 54). Her focus is on the importance of lived experience in their work. This chapter also deals with Agamben’s criticism of Foucault, most notably of the distinction between sovereign power and biopower. It ends with a juxtaposition of Foucault’s notion of “security” and Paul’s concept of “remnant” to deal “with the complex problem of the persistence of death within a world in which death has supposedly been expelled or, at the very least, absorbed into the service of life” (p. 54). What matters here is the insistence on lived life as organising Paul’s and Foucault’s philosophy. Fuggle also emphasises the tension “between the call for a constant reinvention of practices of the self and the idea that one arrives at a point where life is complete and fulfilled” (p. 62). In fact, death functions as something akin to the point that will “make one’s life complete” (p. 63). Fuggle hints that the same tension is at work in the promise of messianic time. Using Agamben, Fuggle notes that “the process of waiting for salvation implies that one has already been saved” (p. 64) and she sees here structural similarities between Paul’s apocalyptic worldview and Foucault’s concept of life as a work of art.

Having posited a parallel reflection on life and death in Foucault and Paul as the ‘driving force behind their thought,’ Fuggle now moves to an analysis of power in her third chapter. Here, power is the force that provides the means to articulate the question of “how to act ethically at all?” (p. 99). She sees power as the conceptual tool used by “Foucault and Paul to make sense of their worlds” (p. 99). Grace indeed raises the a crucial question for Paul, namely how to behave now that one is in a radically new relationship with God, notwithstanding ‘the radically altered status of the law’ (p. 100). She sees a secular equivalent to grace in Foucault’s biopower. Indeed biopower allows for the management of entire populations, but also operates through individual bodies. Since this power operates on and through the body, it is necessary to provide “an in-depth analysis of the body as the site on and through which power operates” (p. 101). Thus her chapter begins with the investigation of “Embodied Experience.”

For Fuggle, both Foucault and Paul present the body as “indelibly marked by power” (p. 102) but also as something that is produced by and reproduces power via “processes of individuation and differentiation” (p. 102). In Foucault, the famous image of the panopticon is a potent example of the fact that Foucault’s preoccupation is not so much with identifying whether power comes from above or from below but rather with the ways in which “power becomes internalized” (p. 105). In this context, the individual becomes the “principle of his own subjection” (p. 105, quoting *Discipline and Punish*). In Paul, the flexibility of the interpretation of Christ’s death either as “legalistic” or “participatory” (p. 107) shows that Paul was aware that, in order to be effective, the meaning of Christ’s death had to be open to change or reconfiguration. This shows Paul’s

understanding of divine power. It has the ability to “create and produce difference” (p. 107). This divine power is at work not only in Christ’s body, but also in everyone else’s. Power, for Foucault but also for Paul, is related to knowledge. In adopting certain discourses about the body, the individual defines themselves and imposes definitions on others. For Paul too, the understanding of the body affects his approach to theology (p. 109). This insistence on the body also means that even saved existence “does not transcend one’s bodily existence” (p. 111).

Paul and Foucault’s statements on the body lay the “groundwork for our own conception of the body as conceptual tool for a different kind of engagement with power” (p. 114); it can be used as a space of creation. Fuggle notes here one tension that she has already mentioned in the context of death’s tension with life, the fact that these new manifestations of power still have to deal with “old forms of power—whether defined as sovereign power or life lived in the flesh” (p. 119). Fuggle sees the answer to this tension in the manner in which Foucault and Paul conceive of the body: it “*is* the violent confrontation of these forces of power” (p. 119). In Foucault this confrontation does not give way to peace, and in Paul one sees that the body is the battle between discourses of life and death.

What Fuggle seems to be getting at, as per Foucault, is “how power defines us” (p. 131) rather than how Foucault (or we, or Paul) define power. What is interesting about power is its ability to create, whether we are reading Foucault’s thought or Paul’s (p. 134). This creativity is measured in terms of relationships. For Paul, it is the relationship between human beings and God. For Foucault, it is “the series of strategies and connections produced between individuals and various social institutions and authorities” (p. 137). This ubiquity of power creates a difficulty in negotiating the concept of freedom both for Foucault and Paul. Paul uses slave language to define the new relationship that humankind can have with God, and for Foucault “freedom is only freedom from one particular form of power” (p. 136). Any resistance to power in one particular place creates new and different relationships of power. In the way that power constantly transforms its operation, “what is of significance” for both Foucault and Paul, “is not the line itself but the process of drawing and redrawing the line” (p. 138). A related question is to ask how power can be modified from within. Fuggle maintains that this can be considered via Paul’s work, by looking at the concepts of law and faith.

In his discussion of the law, Fuggle asserts that Paul has to show that the law has not lost its value but that this value, however, is exceeded by Christ. Agamben, once more, serves as a conversation partner who helps Fuggle establish that for Paul faith is the “fulfillment” of the law (p. 139). Rejecting the new-perspective interpretation of Paul’s critique of the law, Fuggle states that “Paul’s criticism of the law lies in the way others perceive it as the fixed point of God’s authority” (p. 140). Divine power cannot be restricted to the fixed and unchanging letter of the law. This also means that “in the process of salvation, individuals are not responsible” (p. 142). In this chapter, Fuggle focuses on the disciplinary side of power, the process of subjection. In this fashion, power “neutralizes or, more precisely, recuperates any resistance or defiance” (p. 148). The other side of power is the creative, producing and affirming facet of power, which Foucault

identifies as biopower. This next facet of power is explored in chapter 4, “Ethical Subjects.”

The question that opens this chapter is how one thinks of power as operating in the “gaps between what might conventionally be conceived of as both divine and human forms of authority and the institutions, practices, and other mechanisms supporting them” (p. 151). Agamben’s notion of deactivation or inoperativity will be the starting and ending point of Fuggle’s reflection. Fuggle introduced inoperativity in her second chapter, as the process through which “the Mosaic Law is at once fulfilled and suspended by the Christ-event” (p. 151). This principle also functions as a major organising principle for occidental governments. Two Agambenian examples are discussed by Fuggle: the empty throne and the “cut of Apelles.”

In Foucault’s later work, his explorations of power moved from “an analysis of power operations on and through the subject to an examination of the practice and exercises involved in the construction of subjectivity” (p. 154). Through this reflection, Fuggle notes that Foucault provides us with “another way to think about ourselves in relation to power” (p. 154). He opens up possibilities for construction and transformation of the self, and should incite to ethical responsibility. Fuggle calls this a “responsibility without authority” and she sees this as being present behind the ethical dimension of Foucault’s work and also behind Paul’s ethics. It relates to the notion of *oikonomia*. In political theology, what is at stake is the “once present sovereign power whose absence has been filled by a series of secular counterparts who assume their power through occupying the site once belonging to the sacred without ever identifying directly with it” (p. 155). This site is described as “empty throne” by Agamben (p. 155). The empty throne helps to show that “power operates most effectively when its source is indicated yet absent” (p. 157). The problem with the empty throne is that one can take decisions in its name but then defer responsibility to the absent higher authority. Responsibility tends to disappear. Fuggle sees Paul as allowing an “understanding of economy whereby responsibility and accountability are assumed *precisely* because power and authority are acknowledged as definitively absent” (p. 157). The question becomes, “how do we return to this?” A way of answering this for Fuggle lies in seeing ethical existence as “negotiating a series of different practices, positions, and relationships” (p. 158).

She starts with the manner in which Paul aims to construct life during a time of “(perceived) radical, revolutionary change” (p. 158). What she identifies as key in Paul is the shift from seeing law as “absolute authority” to “pure praxis” (p. 159). The shift to “pure praxis” means that in all relationships of power, while there is no absolute freedom, there must be some freedom to allow for operations and effects of power. This also means that one cannot simply turn to a period or a thinker and hope to find solutions for one’s problems. Rather, “our ethical actions have to be rethought everyday” (p. 160). So neither Paul nor Foucault provides readymade solutions for our ethical difficulties. But they help to “explore what an ethics of the self predicated on a radical contestation of history and politics (whether divine or secular) might consist of” (p. 161). Fuggle observes that such an ethics is not based on pastoral power. In fact she sees “pastoral power as a specific ethico-political strategy [that] runs counter to Paul’s mission and tactics”

(p. 161). Rather this ethics is based on stoic modelling, what she calls an “extreme dietetics.”

This extreme dietetics is close to stoic *askesis* but does not run counter to Jewish Torah. Its goal is self-transformation. The self-control involved in stoic practices also involves the offering of oneself “as an example that might encourage and inspire others” (p. 168). It is more about building up the other, than imposing a model from above. And in doing so, Paul seeks to “map everyday life” onto a dangerous and radically new mode of existence. This radical dimension is, as Fuggle notes next, “submerged under hundreds of years of doctrine and dogma” (p. 174). For Fuggle, Deleuze, better than Foucault, allows to reclaim the radicality of Paul’s message. Deleuze “recognizes human existence as one instance of an ongoing creative process” (p. 178). So the task becomes to “exceed human existence itself” (p. 179). It is what Deleuze calls “becoming,” and Fuggle sees becoming at work in Paul’s project of “life in Christ,” which involves a “transformation to a totally new form of existence” (p. 179). However, one is always in the process of this transformation and cannot ever grasp what the end will look like. The problem with Paul’s concept of self-transformation is that it is so radical it excludes those who do not belong to the community of believers, refusing even to recognise their humanity (p. 181).

The author moves next to the discussion of the second Agambenian concept, the “cut of Apelles.” The cut of Apelles refers to the “paradox of cutting,” where cutting only leads to more cutting, and an endless proliferation of criticism (p. 182). She notes that despite the radical new life that she discussed before, “Paul’s understanding of life post-Christ-event also calls for an existence that seems to maintain existing social structures and forms of morality” (p. 185). For Fuggle, Agamben’s deactivation allows to understand this tension. Deactivation for Agamben “is the end toward which humanity is directed” (p. 185). What is at stake in the notion of deactivation is “never the specific practice or activity being deactivated but the specific moment, the event, whereby a practice achieves its objective in being released from this objective” (p. 187).

What remains to be discussed is how this ethics of deactivation embodied in both Paul and Foucault can be distinguished from the “inoperativity defining Western government and, more crucially, underpinning the cycles of production, consumption, rejection, and recuperation that are inherent to capitalism” (p. 192). Fuggle’s conclusion, “Power without Politics,” carries out her “own negotiations with power” (p. 195). She discusses two examples. First, she reflects on the role of the intellectual and how s/he can contest “the conditions of power/knowledge from within and beyond the university.” Second, she uses the Occupy movement to explore the notions of administration and deactivation. She sees them as “key to radical ethico-political action and responsible for the ultimate exhaustion, implosion, and neoliberal recuperation of such action” (p. 196). Two elements can help to rethink truth in academia. First, we need a critique of academic discourse that goes beyond “internal bickering” (p. 199), but this critique, and this is her second point, needs to extend beyond the institution, even at the risk of putting jobs in danger. Fuggle reminds her readers in her conclusion that “it is faith as political organisation, as active responsibility and not

simply as statement or utterance that is key to what we conceive of as a useful engagement with Paul” (202).

Fuggle’s book offers a challenging and rich engagement with Foucault and Paul’s thought. Her mastery of current philosophical thought is impressive and the way she manages to put Foucault and Paul in dialogue with and through Agamben, Žižek, Badiou, Deleuze, Taubes, Nietzsche is almost dizzying. I find her insistence on the body as the site on and through which power operates particularly helpful for rethinking Paul. It indicates that “ethics” in Paul are not mostly about morals or ways to behave (which we can then simply import into our own context) but are about complex relationships of power that need to be continually re-evaluated. Focusing on power also allows us to see how Paul’s ethical injunctions as complex negotiations of power. They are strategies of subjection that aim to transform individuals through the Christ event, and are thus disciplinary. But these injunctions are also strategies of building up the other to move him or her towards autonomy. Some might perhaps regret that some current scholarship on Paul concerning his relation to the law or Israel is not taken into account in Fuggle’s volume (for example, the more radical work of Paula Fredriksen, or Mark D. Nanos), but what Fuggle is interested in producing is not simply another book on Paul. Fuggle rethinks power through her encounters with Paul and in that way her choices of interlocutor are more than justified.

Fuggle’s book opens up new arrays of thought for Pauline scholarship, pulling contemporary culture and vivid reflection into an apt and cogent dialogue.



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