

Beyond Neoliberalism: New Foucauldian Perspectives

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The term 'neoliberalism' is contested and has a variety of meanings. From a Marxist perspective, neoliberalism is the latest - disruptive - phase of capitalism. From a Foucauldian perspective, neoliberalism is an extensive governmental regime that involves a remaking of the economy, society and the self along the lines of the enterprise. What is the use and usefulness of these approaches for analysing current neoliberal societies and developments - including among others a rise in 'populism'?

Symposium on the occasion of the university retirement of Karen Vintges
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UNIVERSITEIT VAN AMSTERDAM

Welcome / 10.00-10.15

Panel 1. 'Neoliberalism': Marxist and Foucauldian Perspectives / 10.15-11.00

Michiel Leezenberg - 'State Racism': Neoliberal Populism in Foucauldian Perspective

Foucault's succinct and puzzling remarks on 'state racism' not only reflect an ongoing debate with Marxism, but also point to a genealogical critique of nationalism. In this contribution, I will discuss, first, how Foucault develops a critique of, in particular, Althusser's notions of ideology and the ideological state apparatus, which also targets Stalinism as a disease of modern power. Second, I discuss Foucault's original genealogical critique of nationalism, which allows for a new understanding of forms of populist nationalism and xenophobia in the neoliberal present.

Liesbeth Schoonheim - Beyond Critique: Arendtian and Foucauldian Storytelling in a Neoliberal Era

This paper brings together insights from Arendt's and Foucault's 'storytelling' to sketch the contours of a social critique of neoliberalism. Arendt and Foucault emphatically reject ideology critique and develop a genealogical method of interrogating the present that draws extensively from their reflections on literature. In the first part of this paper, I show that their methodology reflects their attempt to rethink truth and the political power that truth claims can wield. In the second part, I ask to what extent an Arendtian or Foucaultian storytelling helps to understand neoliberalism and what I take to be one of its latest symptoms, 'post-truth'.

Discussion

11.00-11.15 Break

Panel 2. 'Neoliberalism' and 'Populism' / 11.15-12.30

Laure Bastiaans - Truth-Telling in a Post-Truth World: A Foucauldian Critique of Populism

Of the many things that the UK's departure from the European Union has revealed, perhaps one of the most remarkable is the 'post-truth' political culture which it has legitimized. In this contribution, I will argue that Foucault's discussion of *parrhesia* provides fertile ground for thinking about true discourse and free speech in today's political climate. After discussing the linkage between *parrhesia* as candid, truthful and trustworthy speech *vis-a-vis* the power-knowledge-ethics triangle, it will be argued that Foucault's history of truth does not dismiss truth as some have argued, but, on the contrary, demonstrates that truth matters in the political realm.

Jan Overwijk - Who's Afraid of Postmodernism? New Right Meta-Narratives in Today's Culture Wars

Why has postmodernism become one of the central adversaries in the rhetorical-ideological discourse of the New Right? This talk starts by surveying some of today's most prominent critics of postmodernism within the 'culture wars' and 'science wars' that have emerged since the late 1980s and 1990s. It argues that the New Right singles out postmodernism as its enemy because postmodernism represents the historical mood that accepts and embraces the fracture, paradoxes and insecurities of the modern rather than seeking refuge in metaphysical imaginaries. The unfair and caricatural attacks on postmodernism thus reveal the New Right's struggle with what postmodernism successfully achieved: coming to terms with the modern.

Karen Vintges: Neoliberalism and Populism: Michel Foucault, Wendy Brown, and Jordan Peterson

Many authors agree that current right-wing populism conjoins neoliberal and non-market elements, and as such is a qualitatively new phenomenon. In her recent (2019) book, *In the Ruins of Neoliberalism*, Wendy Brown argues that right-wing populism is the monstrous offspring of neoliberalism, namely an effect of the latter's four-decades-long "assaults on democracy, equality, and society" which unleashed unintended consequences. Some (cf. Dean 2018) have argued that Brown disregards the fact that the ingredients of right-wing populisms spring from ideologies independent of neoliberalism. How to make sense of this strange mix of ideological ingredients as it is expressed, for example, in the work of Jordan Peterson? Analyzing his work, I aim to elucidate the deep structure of thought that holds this mix together, and that ultimately creates the discursive space for violence, including sexual violence against women.

Discussion

12.30 -13.15 Break

Keynote

13.15-14.15

Dianna Taylor - Foucault Scholarship in the United States: Contemporary Trends and a Feminist Perspective

Dianna Taylor is Professor of Philosophy at John Carroll University in Cleveland, Ohio, USA. She was Coordinator of the U.S. Foucault Circle from 2010-2016. She is co-editor (with Karen Vintges) of *Feminism and the Final Foucault* (2004), editor of *Foucault: Key Concepts* (2014), and author of *Sexual Violence and Humiliation: A Foucauldian-Feminist Perspective* (Routledge 2020).

The first part of this talk provides an overview of major themes and problems currently being analyzed in U.S. Foucault scholarship, as well as situates those themes and problems within the prevailing U.S. sociopolitical context. The second part of the talk shows that Foucault's conceptualization of normalization provides crucial insight into the nature and function of gendered power relations. In the contemporary U.S., sexual violence against women is being framed and responded to in new ways. On the one hand, the obvious deep ambivalence in the face of serious accusations made against two of the most prominent politicians in the country - including the sitting president of the United States - reflects a broader normalization of sexual violence against women. On the other hand, women, including victims/survivors of sexual violence, are increasingly responding to this normalization not with polite objections or reasoned argumentation but with insistent, aggressive, public, feminist protest. This protest reflects Foucault's views that 1). normalizing power shapes but does not determine the conditions of human existence and 2). that parrhesiastic counter-normalizing resistance both reflects and in turn strengthens the self-relation's interconnectedness with others and world in ways that promote solidarity.

14.15-15.00 Discussion
