

Foucault and Sociology

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Abstract

Michel Foucault was a gifted but elusive thinker with a wide and continuing impact across many academic fields. This article positions his work as a historical sociology of knowledge and evaluates its contribution. After reviewing Foucault's central preoccupations as they emerge in his major works, the argument briefly considers their influence on accounting scholarship as an informative exemplar of a wider Foucault effect. Four key areas for the sociological reception of Foucault are then considered: the nature of discourse and archaeology, his historical method, the problem of agency and action, and his conception of power. Articulating Foucault's relationship to sociology is inherently problematic, not least because he takes the emergence of the sciences of man as something to be explained rather than augmented. Yet his work remains a rich resource for inquiries of the sociological type, is broadly aligned with a practice turn in social theory, and intersects with several themes in both mainstream and critical sociology.

INTRODUCTION

In this piece of research on prisons, as in my earlier work, the target of analysis wasn't "institutions," "theories" or "ideology," but practices—with the aim of grasping the conditions which make these acceptable at a given moment . . . practices being understood here as places where what is said and what is done, rules imposed and reasons given, the planned and the taken for granted meet and interconnect.

—Foucault (1991b, p. 75)

Michel Foucault did not aspire to produce a systemic view or to establish a field of inquiry. In his many interviews, a form of dissemination to which he was committed (Kritzmman 1988, p. vii), he engaged in extensive self-commentary and clarification, repeatedly describing himself as only producing fragments and speculations, and often correcting earlier claims. His work is also implicitly and elusively working through and opposed to both Marx and Weber, and its relation to sociology understood as a social scientific discipline is a complex and sometimes contradictory one. Yet for all its analytical difficulties and frustrations, and the many cryptic denials and restatements by Foucault himself as his focus evolved, his work is a serious and attractive resource for its range and virtuosity and for its alignment with many of the preoccupations of modern sociology. He is the subject of an intellectual industry of interpretation and extension that has continued to thrive since his death in 1984, not least because the lectures and notes from his time as professor of the History of Systems of Thought at the Collège de France continue to be transcribed, translated, and published. This review provides a necessarily limited overview of his reception within sociology and of his wider influence.

A few comments are necessary by way of introduction. First, Foucault was trained in a distinctive French school of philosophical historicizing that creates exegetical and analytical challenges for many commentators. Even those most favorably disposed admit that he is sometimes difficult to read. However, de-

spite his complex association with structuralism (a label he continually denied and from which he sought to escape) and its stylistic densities, readers are also struck by his evident "love of facts" (Hacking 1986) and detailed description. Indeed, Veyne (2010, p. 108) describes Foucault as a "good positivist" for whom nothing exists "except that which is empirical and philosophical." This positivistic aspect of Foucault's work explains why territorial and methodological disputes with traditional historians and concerns about empirical sufficiency among sociologists were inevitable, especially as he sought to create a new philosophical frame for existing historical narratives. Second, this review does not address the inevitably complex and contingent issues of translation that have shaped the timing and diffusion of Foucault's works in the English language [see, for example, Szokolczai (1998b) on Foucault's lectures, Gordon (1992) on his *Histoire de la Folie*, and Donzelot & Gordon (2008) on the UK reception of his work on governmentality], preferring to focus on the specific themes at the heart of Foucault's mix of concept building and historical empiricism.

The next section begins by reviewing the development of Foucault's work. Although this is well-trodden ground and the subject of numerous commentaries and critical exegeses (e.g., Downing 2008; Dreyfus & Rabinow 1982; Gane 1986; Gutting 1989, 2005; Kurzweil 1977; Mills 2003; Sheridan 1980; Smart 1983), Foucault can be fruitfully approached in terms of his evolving articulation of a historical sociology of knowledge, practice, and the individuation of persons. The second section deals with the reception, adaptation, and extension of Foucault's thought within specific subfields of sociology. Accounting is chosen as an exemplar of this reception, both because it represents precisely the kind of "immature science" (Hacking 1979) upon which Foucault focused and because of its intrinsic sociological interest. The third section addresses four inter-related critical preoccupations with Foucault's work, areas that are indicative of his audacity and originality but that also create challenges

for his reception within sociology and other disciplines: discourse, history, agency, and power.

BETWEEN PHILOSOPHY AND SOCIOLOGY

Foucault's (1961) early work on madness reveals his methodological determination to defamiliarize and to provide a counterpoint to enlightenment and functionalist narratives of progress. He argues that the emergence of the category of madness results in the progressive exclusion, institutionalization, and subjection to expert knowledge of groups of people. Foucault narrates the prehistory of this category, reaching back to a time when the distinction between madness and reason, the mad and the sane, had not yet been drawn. Famously, he utilizes a temporal distinction between three ages, namely the preclassical, classical, and modern periods. In the preclassical period to the middle of the seventeenth century, madness as a social category is not a given. This changes with the creation of the general hospital in Paris in 1657 that included those categorized as mad. The end of the eighteenth century to the beginning of what Foucault calls the modern age is marked in 1794 by the creation of the asylum and by an institutional distinction between the treatable and the irredeemable who must be contained. At this point, he suggests, a completely new relation between madness and medicine comes into existence. Yet Foucault's analysis should not be mistaken for another history of psychology or of madness. Rather, he addresses the historical conditions for psychology to emerge as a body of expert knowledge and addresses its relation to a range of new objects.

Notwithstanding debates and misunderstandings about Foucault's apparent romanticism of the mad, arising in part from problems of partial translation (Gordon 1992), this early work establishes the contours of an approach to knowledge that becomes more pronounced and explicit over time. In *The Birth of the Clinic* (Foucault 1963), he is also concerned with the hidden system of rules that underlie and make

possible official and authorized statements of knowledge. Foucault seeks to reconstruct the shift in the nature of the relationship between medical knowledge, disease, and intervention. From a position where disease is regarded as independent of its physical manifestations, the body increasingly becomes the focus for expert interpretation and diagnosis. It is important to note that Foucault is not developing a normative humanist concern for the subjugated individual as a patient in an asymmetric relationship with doctors—as critical medicine scholars have preferred to interpret him (Petersen & Bunton 1997). Indeed, he is careful to argue that he is not judging one kind of medicine against another (Osborne 1992). Rather, his approach is a form of historical-philosophical analysis of the manner in which practices come to individuate their objects of concern, specifically how the human body is subjected to a newly combined juridical and medical apparatus.

This analytical focus becomes clearer in *The Order of Things* (Foucault 1966), which represents the most explicit articulation of Foucault's historically oriented sociology of knowledge, coincidentally published in the same year as Berger & Luckmann's (1966) *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge* (see also Downing 2008, p. 47). Foucault famously begins with a series of, often humorous, reflections on an ancient Chinese taxonomy in which relations of similarity across categories seem impossible to understand for the outsider. His point is to make familiar knowledge practices seem strange and historically contingent, to ask how these practices function, and to analyze the kind of order they create. As before, and in contrast to a pure history of ideas, he is concerned with the hidden conditions of possibility of knowledge and the contingently formed relations of similarity that underlie classifications. From this perspective, the earlier works on madness and medicine can be read as historical case studies in how specific "regimes of truth," as he calls them, came into being.

Commentators have drawn attention to parallels between Foucault's form of historicized

epistemological inquiry and Kuhn's views on normal and abnormal science (Kuhn 1970, Hacking 1979). Yet unlike Kuhn, Foucault's approach can also be compared to Bloor's (1976) "strong program" demand for sociological symmetry in the explanation of true and false beliefs. For Foucault, the question at stake is not truth as such but the social and institutional historical conditions under which authorized statements can be made that count as true. He conducts a comparative study of the discourses of three fields of knowledge that become conceptually transformed at the end of the eighteenth century. Before that time, knowledge of natural history, of wealth, and of general grammar is essentially classificatory in nature, without consciousness of the role of human subjects in practices of representation. This gives way to the forms of knowing that reflect on the role of the subject more directly and are the precursors of modern biology, economics, and linguistics, respectively. According to Foucault, they mark a radical break with their predecessors and establish what he calls a new *episteme* in two important respects.

First, each field of knowledge acquires a new epistemological depth in the form of demands to get below the surface of things: Behind living organisms are hidden developmental processes; beyond the surface features of money is a dynamic system by which wealth is produced; and beneath the structures of grammar are mechanisms by which language changes and adapts. Second, Foucault interprets this break as marking the origins of new human sciences situated at the boundaries of life, labor, and language and increasingly focused on "man" as a new object of investigation—a "recent invention," as he famously puts it. Though Foucault clearly does not intend "human" to correspond to the humanities or social sciences in their modern meanings, he does imply that the conditions of possibility for the fields of psychology and sociology are to be found in the inauguration of modern bodies of knowledge that are incommensurable with what went before (Hacking 1979, Kennedy 1979).

In *The Order of Things*, Foucault is trying to lead the reader to those key points of rupture in history when much of what we take for granted now in the modern landscape of knowledge came into existence—a time when the clinical and social sciences could not be distinguished. He is suggesting that the actors of modern social science are made up and invented via knowledge practices that necessarily individuate their objects in ways we take for granted today. Foucault suggests that our contemporary landscape of academic disciplines, including sociology, is the product of the combined emergence of an empirical domain, new forms of (Kantian) philosophical reflection on the subject, and the growing authority of mathematics in the natural sciences (Kennedy 1979). Indeed, Foucault's approach was much influenced by his reception of Kant's anthropological writings (Foucault 2008). If he is correct, then some contemporary conflicts in social science—such as the so-called *Methodenstreit*—can be traced back to these three components of this epistemological shift and their relationship to each other. Foucault also suggests that reflections of the sociological type were necessarily preceded and conditioned by material problems of social order, thereby hinting at the practical origins of articulated knowledge that he develops in later work.

In *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, Foucault (1969) provides the most explicit, yet most abstract and challenging, reflection on his method of analysis and core conceptual apparatus. It is an attempt to show how to do what he calls archaeological analysis, but Foucault makes few concessions to the reader. Statements or propositions (*énoncés*) are the basic units of discourse, and their totality comprises discursive formations that are the conditions of possibility of thought and hence of action. Specific discursive formations, or *epistemes*, create positions for subjects to occupy and in which they may be authorized to speak; for example, the "enunciative modality" describes the legitimized position of the individual in a field of knowledge, enabling statements to have a performative character in a

way that parallels the Austinian theory of speech acts (Wagner-Pacifici 2010, p. 1359). For Foucault, *who* is authorized to speak matters more than the *intentions and actions* of any specific speaker.

It is often argued that the underlying methodological position of Foucault's archaeology leaves no place for individual intentions, personality, or agency. Yet in subsequent interviews he repeatedly stresses that that he does not exclude interest-based explanations of actions. Rather, his concern is with something different, namely the historical conditions of possibility for the positivity and facticity of the taken-for-granted rules inhabited by human actors. In its critical emphasis, Foucault's method has obvious affinities with other analysts of the hidden, not least Marx and Freud, and in later work he looks back on, and reinterprets, this Kantian style of approach as being centrally concerned with the way that humans are made into the subjects of systems of knowledge. For example, he reflects further on the historically contingent origins of the idea of a sovereign self, epitomized by the Cartesian *cogito*. He traces this idea back into monastic practices and to even earlier doctrines of asceticism and self-management (Foucault 2004a,b).

Discipline and Punish (1975) is arguably Foucault's most accessible monograph. The book begins with a methodological device that Foucault uses several times: the dramatic juxtaposition of two events separated in time to create a sense of change and rupture in the mind of the reader. The first is his famous description of public torture and execution; the second, a century later, concerns the prison as an institution. Foucault uses this juxtaposition to argue that the public infliction of pain has been displaced by a new mode of discipline of the body, via surveillance, correction, and training in an enclosed space. Drawing on Bentham's design for the panopticon, Foucault argues for the significance of the "permanent possibility of visibility" as a general principle of exercising power over the body and of coordinating individual bodies with others. The prison is the exemplary organizational location for a double sense of

discipline in Foucault's sense—both as constraint over the individual and as an individuating positive body of knowledge. Foucault's analysis also pushes its boundaries beyond prisons as institutions to encompass all systematic, calculating forms of observation that are grounded in a mundane world of registers and multiple practices of examination.

The examination that places individuals in a field of surveillance also situates them in a network of writing; it engages them in a whole mass of documents that capture and fix them . . . the accumulation of documents, their seriation, the organization of comparative fields making it possible to classify, to form categories, to determine averages, to fix norms. (Foucault 1975, pp. 189–90)

Importantly, *Discipline and Punish* marks the beginning of Foucault's increasingly explicit analysis of power as an enabling and constitutive field of force, rather than emanating from a central source that is essentially repressive and dominating in nature. His construct of power-knowledge (*pouvoir-savoir*) is intended to conceptualize the embeddedness of knowledge in practices of control and their related forms of resistance. The historical starting points for thinking about power-knowledge are not the institutions of law or the state and their abstract capacities and intentions, but rather what Foucault calls the ignoble archival foundations of local and specific forms of disciplinary knowledge that are progressively materialized in documents. Foucault directs attention to the systems of intense registration such as modern accounting, discussed below, that exert power over bodies, behavior, and cognition from the bottom up and that may evolve into sciences of greater or lesser maturity. Accordingly, Foucault does not provide a theory of power in the sense understood and debated by modern political theory. Rather, he directs analytical attention to the often mundane rules embedded in practices that govern what can be said, known, and done, by whom, and to whom.

Although Foucault's emerging analytics of power-knowledge may seem intuitively obvious in the case of prisons and even hospitals, the same cannot be said about his work on sexuality. Yet here his views on power are most explicitly developed. The first volume of *The History of Sexuality* (Foucault 1976) is not about sex in the contemporary sense of that term, but about discourses and categories of sexuality and the variety of mechanisms for producing acceptable statements about sexual behavior. In particular, Foucault argues for the conditioning role of Christian confessional practice in translating desires into discourses that seek ever more elaborate analytical vocabularies. He also argues against the repressive hypothesis, namely, the idea that power acts on sex in a repressive manner, and he suggests the more productive and constitutive role for statements about sexual conduct, which proliferate into concerns with population and liberal political economy more generally:

[T]he political significance of the problem of sex is due to the fact that sex is located at the point of intersection of the discipline of the body and the control of the population. (Foucault 1980a [1977], p. 125)

For Foucault, there is an important continuity between the concerns of individual sexual conduct and those of the regulation of population; he explicates the links between ascetic practices of bodily self-discipline and those of liberal government in a way that cuts across traditional efforts to distinguish micro and macro levels of analysis (Lemke 2001a). He is not directly interested in government understood narrowly as the executive arm of representative democracy but in governmentality as a broad range of highly specific practices that individuate and operate on persons (van Krieken 1996, Rose et al. 2006). His archaeological approach reconstructs the emergence of an art of governing from its pastoral origins to its manifestation in complex, autonomous fields of administrative practice (Foucault 1988, 1991a; Steiner 2008). Foucault argues that problems of sovereignty

and legitimacy, with their corresponding focus on law and legal process, came to be eclipsed by more operational issues of population and its management. The notion of economy began to lose its basis in the model of the family and acquired its modern meaning in the nineteenth century. At the same time, technologies such as statistics emerged as critical conditions of possibility for a new mode of governing (Hacking 1991). In short, Foucault traces the formation of the new science of political economy to the conjunction of operational and administrative preoccupations with population, territory, and wealth:

I wanted to demonstrate the deep historical link between the movement that overturns the constants of sovereignty in consequence of the problem of choices of government, the movement that brings about the emergence of population as a datum, as a field of intervention and as an objective of governmental techniques, and the process which isolates the economy as a specific sector of reality, and political economy as the science and technique of intervention of the government in that field of reality. (Foucault 1991a, p. 102)

From Foucault's point of view, both the state and the economy are mythicized abstractions that refer to the entirety of techniques that today straddle public administration, macroeconomic management, regulation, private management, and many other expert practices besides. The affinity with core themes in economic sociology are clear. What Foucault (1991a, p. 103) calls the governmentalization of the state also has many parallels with the idea of the regulatory state in political science (Pildes & Sunstein 1995); it is a phenomenon that invites analysis of the specific roles played by multiple instruments of economic and social knowledge operating beyond the traditionally conceived boundaries of the state and serving various programs of control (Dean 2003, Rose & Miller 1992, Rose et al. 2006). Not least is that this project also involves the analysis of how different strands of neoliberal political philosophy

inform the specific shape of governmentality practices and reflect specific conceptions of the relations between state, market, and rational action (Gordon 1991; Lemke 2001a,b).

The year 2009 marked the 25th anniversary of Michel Foucault's death. Publication of his taped lectures at the Collège de France between 1970 and 1984 is ongoing (Venn & Terranova 2009; see also the journal *Foucault Studies*). The exegetical account of his work given above is necessarily partial; little has been said about his later preoccupations with experience and ethics and their grounding in ascetic technologies for shaping the self, preoccupations that were always latent in his earlier work and became more salient for him over time (Callero 2003, pp. 117–18; Foucault 1984a,b; Steiner 2008). Rather, the shape of a historical sociology of knowledge (Swidler & Ardit 1994, pp. 314–15) visible in Foucault's major works has been elaborated, consisting of two key elements: the analysis of an epistemological shift at the end of the eighteenth century that makes possible the sciences of man, including sociology; and an analysis of the material practices of control and data gathering that evolve into the instruments of political economy and population management. How these two elements—knowledge and power, respectively—contribute to the making up of human actors is the major focus of Foucauldian scholarship and interpretation.

THE FOUCAULT EFFECT

Foucault's reception within sociology is mixed, and perhaps necessarily so. Those who recognize his brilliance, breadth, and depth nevertheless acknowledge the density of his prose and his tendency to rhetoric over analysis. Yet such barriers are often by-products of translation issues. Furthermore, he engaged extensively in interviews—many of which are lucid and clear—in a process of self-commentary and clarification. So to say that his combination of topics, methods, and style is “completely foreign to the university-trained American scholar” (Kennedy 1979, p. 269) is a little unfair. Because he does not directly engage with

classical reference points in sociology, commentators have also taken the view that, for all the flamboyance, other scholars have covered much of the same ground. Collins (1989, p. 131) admits that Foucault is the most significant of the French “discourse” school, but the historical patterns Foucault emphasizes are congruent with Weberian and Durkheimian theories of modernity. Indeed, *The Order of Things* can be read as an attempt to show the historical conditions of possibility for Durkheim's reflections on the problem of order (Smart 1982).

In subsequent debate, Collins (1990) is more overtly critical of the amateur sociology of the French intellectual class—though he exempts Bourdieu from this charge. Foucault is valuable at best for “taking ideas that parallel existing sociological ideas and applying them to fresh empirical materials” (Collins 1990, p. 462). The empirical documentation of processes of bureaucratization in prisons and mental institutions is valuable, but for Collins and others it is not a “great departure in general theory.” He also adds that although much of Foucault's work relates to the microfoundations of macrosociology, it lacks any microinteractions, other than an appeal to micropower, which might make a contribution (Collins 1990, p. 462). Yet, although Foucault himself (1980a [1977], pp. 124–25) admits this difficulty of relating body-specific technologies of control to the population as a global body, he defends the application of similar methods at both levels and in *Discipline and Punish* carefully describes microprocesses of normalization via the examination.

Reviews of his books in the main American sociology journals are also lukewarm. Shelley's (1979) review of *Discipline and Punish* suggests that Goffman made a bigger contribution to our understanding of totalizing institutions. Similarly, Kurzweil's (1979) review of the first volume of *The History of Sexuality* warns readers that they will require a high tolerance for “structuralist textual analysis and abstractions.” Yet equally there are many sympathetic readings. Hacking (2004) argues for a complementarity between Goffman, the sociologist, and

Foucault, the archaeologist: Both are concerned with what Hacking (2004, p. 288) describes as the institutional and classificatory conditions of “making up people,” and both are strong where the other is weak:

Goffman analyzed, by a series of ideal types, the ways in which human roles are constituted in face-to-face interactions within an institutional setting, and how patterns of normality and deviance work on individual agents—and how the agents change these norms, by a sort of feedback effect. Foucault’s archaeologies established the preconditions for and the mutations between successive institutional forms.

So where Goffman coproduces a brilliant account of asylums and a method appropriate to the asylum as an object, Foucault’s object is much broader: not just the prison but an entire apparatus or setup (*dispositif*) of laws, architecture, administrative practices, and words, for which the archaeological method is needed (Veyne 2010, pp. 30–31).

Agger (1991, p. 117) locates Foucault’s work within postmodernist sociology where he has been influential in cultural studies, the sociology of social control, and the study of sexuality. Like Hacking, he suggests that Foucault’s positivistic fascination for facts and archives is combined with methods that are, in intention and spirit if not execution, close to ethnomethodology; parts of *Discipline and Punish* can be read in parallel to Goffman’s treatment of labeling and its effects. And according to Agger (1991, p. 124), any apparent sloppiness of method is compensated for by the imaginative use of historical and cultural data, assembled into a theory of social control.

Foucault’s relationship to Weberian thinking is a complex topic in its own right. He says repeatedly in interviews that he, apparently contra Weber, is not interested in rationalization as such, or in worldviews, but in analyzing specific rationalities of practices. Interestingly, Veyne (2010, pp. 34–35), a strong supporter of Foucault, thinks Foucault

is incorrect about Weber’s universalism and argues that Foucault’s concept of discourse can be read as an ideal type. Others also point to important affinities (Deflem 2000, p. 743; Gordon 1987; Steiner 2008). For example, O’Neill (1986, p. 43) argues that Weber was also an “archaeologist of the power man exerts over himself” and that Foucault’s analysis of discipline complements Weber’s formal analysis of the bureaucratic state. In addition, O’Neill suggests that Foucault “broadens the Weberian concept of administrative power into the embodied strategies of industrial power,” although Alford (2000) warns that it is a mistake to compare Foucault and Weber in terms of marginal and central conceptions of power, respectively. Szokolczai (1998a,b) further elaborates the close affinities between Foucault and Weber, specifically between Foucault’s archaeology and genealogy of subjectivity and Weber’s history of science and analysis of the conduct of life. On this latter point, Smith (1999) draws out the parallels between Foucault’s later work and that of Elias.

Even if one believes that the “amateur sociology of the Paris philosophers and literary theorists is impressive mainly to people who lack much grounding in what sociology has already achieved” (Collins 1990, p. 462), there can be no doubting the empirical reality of Foucault’s influence as “both a social fact and a problem to be explained” (Szokolczai 1998a, p. 1403). Foucault’s influence and style of analysis can be traced to the history and sociology of medicine (Jones & Porter 1994), crime (Garland 2001), law (Hunt & Wickham 1994, Simon 1994, Rose & Valverde 1998), and psychology (Rose 1989). Yet the impact has been much wider than this, extending into literary criticism (During 1992), the history of statistics (Hacking 1991), and risk management (Ewald 1991, Defert 1991). To this list, Fox (1998, p. 416) adds patriarchy, masculinity, architecture, dentistry, developmental psychology, religion, pornography, education, beauty, and fitness. And it should not be forgotten that Foucault has also been taken seriously by philosophers (Rorty 1991) and historians (Goldstein 1994, Megill 1979).

His reach, influence, and reception stretch across both substantive concerns and academic disciplines.

It is dangerous to generalize about the nature of these diverse tributaries of influence. Yet a core part of his impact lies in the applied potential and attraction of the historical sociology of knowledge described above. Foucault's emerging focus on what he calls power-knowledge directs empirical attention to the documents and discourses that apparently enmesh people as subjects of disciplines and that, in doing so, recursively form subjectivities and practices. This work, and particularly key parts of *Discipline and Punish*, has been appealing as a platform for sociologies of specific practices, providing both the theoretical and stylistic confidence necessary to address the significance of the apparently mundane. However, this sense of a Foucault effect (Burchell et al. 1991, Donzelot & Gordon 2008) should not be mistaken for a series of efforts at purity of interpretation and application; his work is perhaps better understood as a sociological resource and as a set of genealogical sensibilities about forms of knowing (Rabinow & Rose 2003). One unlikely area where these sensibilities have been evident is accounting.

Accounting is of sociological interest for several reasons. First, its claim to be an academic field has always been problematic; the University of Cambridge excluded accounting from its economics and politics degree because it was "not a proper university subject" (Puxty et al. 1994, p. 153). This marginal and mundane status locates it precisely in the "epistemological twilight" (Goldstein 1984, p. 178) that interested Foucault most. Second, although Weber and Sombart had recognized the central significance of calculation in general and bookkeeping in particular (Carruthers & Espeland 1991), accounting came to be studied, if at all, by economists and those with economics training. Sociological views of accounting as practice (as opposed to accountants as professionals) are relatively recent, evolving largely on the back of developments in organizational theory (Miller 2008, p. 52).

Yet the accounting field encompasses many of the processes and problems that deeply interest sociology scholars, not least those who analyze culture, cognition, and science. How knowledge and categories are produced, how this shapes what people attend to and how they act, and how the cultural position of expertise takes shape are all at stake in accounting.

The accounting reception of Foucault is a reflection of his influence on the study of management generally in the United Kingdom for historically contingent reasons (Carter et al. 2002). As business schools expanded in the 1970s and 1980s, they became homes for displaced sociologists (Carter 2008, p. 21) who applied their critical insights to the study of organizations (Burrell 1988, McKinlay & Starkey 1998, Sewell & Wilkinson 1992, Townley 1993). These peculiar conditions in UK business schools meant that "[b]y the late 1990s, Foucault was indisputably one of the most important sources in organization studies" (Carter 2008, p. 24). Foucault's reception within UK accounting, as a subfield of management studies, was due largely to a small number of highly influential papers that appeared in the mid-1980s. A footnote reference to *Discipline and Punish* first appears in the Burchell et al. (1980) study of the roles of accounting in organizations and society and develops as a more fully articulated point of reference in several later key publications. Two specific papers are emblematic of what came to be called the Foucauldian turn in accounting research.

First, Burchell et al. (1985) analyze the rise and fall of a specific innovation in external accounting: the value added statement. This was a reporting experiment that provided a new kind of visibility to the contribution of different agents to organizational profit and wealth. The emergence and decline of this new kind of accounting report in the United Kingdom in the 1970s are explained as an event formed at the conjunction of three distinct policy discourses, namely (a) accounting standard setting and the problem of corporate performance measurement, (b) macroeconomic policy pre-occupations with improving UK productivity,

and (c) new ideas about industrial relations and employee reporting. The case suggests a

three branched genealogy... of the specific social space in which value added appeared and developed.... [T]he space which the value added event occupied is seen to be comprised of a very particular field of relations which existed between certain institutions, economic and administrative processes, bodies of knowledge, systems of norms and measurement, and classification techniques. We have called such a field an accounting constellation. (Burchell et al. 1985, pp. 399–400)

Importantly, value added accounting statements were far from being technically standardized and were highly ambiguous in their meaning and scope. This was an ambiguity that was critical to the conjunctural support they received from the three arenas described above: “[T]he very ambiguity of value added might, in other words, be implicated in its emergence and functioning” (Burchell et al. 1985, p. 390).

Secondly, Miller & O’Leary’s (1987, p. 237) approach is also self-consciously genealogical in the specific oppositional sense of “questioning... our contemporarily received notions by a demonstration of their historical emergence.” Against functionalist and progressivist stories of accounting change, on the one hand, and interest-based accounts, on the other, they position the emergence of standard costing practices as part of the new management sciences taking shape around the end of the nineteenth century and beginning of the twentieth. At this time, the employee was being surrounded by multiple standards of conduct and work practice. A web of surveillance and control practices, partly inspired by eugenics, focused on reducing waste and increasing efficiency, at the levels of both the nation and the individual. The firm, in the early twentieth century, like the clinic and the prison in Foucault’s analyses, became a site for intersecting strategies with a common focus on the idea of efficiency. Together with the emerging authority of scientific management and industrial psychology, conditions existed

for a historical constellation in which cost accounting was redefined. In this view, so-called standard costing was much more than a technical innovation, although it came to seem merely technical and common sense; it was a new basis for observing the workings of the individual and for monitoring deviation from costing norms. Its historical conditions of possibility could be found in wider discourses about efficiency between 1900 and 1930:

[W]ithin this period a diverse group, including engineers, psychologists, accountants, medical practitioners, proponents of eugenics, journalists and politicians, propose various projects for improving the life of the person and, thereby, of the nation.... [T]he firm can be seen as one of the sites in society towards which such projects would address themselves. (Miller & O’Leary 1987, p. 261)

Both Burchell et al. (1985) and Miller & O’Leary (1987) use history to reveal the contingent and nonautonomous nature of technical practices, a critical act for a practice such as accounting that tends to forget its own history and promote functional narratives of progress, such as harmonization and best practice. Both develop analyses that do not appeal to the interests of specific agents, but rather seek to describe the formation of a historical *a priori*, in Foucault’s sense, that shows how new accounting practices emerge at the conjunction of significant discourses governing what it is possible to say. Like Foucault, both papers appeal to event-type constructs in the accounting field (e.g., constellation). Although the sense of event is at best implicit, both papers reveal the circulatory nature of power-knowledge in time (Wagner-Pacifici 2010, p. 1367), which results in the coformation of both specific accounting practices and the networks of power that enable those practices to be accepted, albeit temporarily. Here, there are analytical and empirical parallels with Abbott’s (2005) concept of linked ecologies. Interestingly, both papers anticipate ideas of performativity as they have subsequently developed in the sociology of finance (e.g.,

Mackenzie & Millo 2003). For example, Burchell et al. (1985) emphasize how accounting gives rise to, and shapes, the context in which it operates, echoing Goldstein's (1984) appraisal of Foucault. And in both papers, the formal organization or firm is conceptualized as porous to its environment, providing overlaps between Foucault and new institutionalism in organizational analysis (DiMaggio & Powell 1991).

Both papers are also governmental in the sense of locating accounting as a hybrid of tools and ideas enacted in a wider and more fluid web of regulatory arrangements for knowing people, populations, and organizations (see also Hoskin & Macve 1986, Hopwood 1987). Miller & O'Leary take the further step of explicitly positioning accounting in the space of the managerial human sciences, in Foucault's specific sense of that term, for knowing and governing subjects. The echoes of Weber are also undoubtedly present in this reception of Foucault; the construction of the governable person is not to be equated with the entirely obedient individual but more subtly with the creation of zones of freedom of choice through which the "soul of the citizen" is made real and visible (Gordon 1987, 1991, pp. 5–6). And both papers reflect a principle of explanatory symmetry (Bloor 1976)—failed practices are as significant as those that endure and must be explained in the same way. However, like Foucault himself, the absence of a clearly articulated critical standpoint has led both of these papers to be accused of an apparent neoconservatism (Armstrong 1994, Grey 1994, Neimark 1990).

These exemplars, and other accounting studies (Power 1997), have become reference points in a larger body of work on the sociology of quantification, where Foucault's influence is also visible. Espeland & Stevens (1998, p. 331) analyze the "constitutive power" of practices that commensurate and standardize and their role in the expansion of accountability movements and organizations that hold others to account. Specifically, Sauder & Espeland (2009) argue for the utility of Foucault's work in understanding situations in which one

would expect, but does not find, institutional resistance to new control practices, namely the use of rankings and league tables for universities. Instead one finds that, for all their epistemological weaknesses, rankings become embedded in these organizations, shaping resource allocation, management attention, and conceptions of self. From Foucault's farsighted point of view, as Sauder & Espeland (2009) note, rankings are exactly one of those ignoble human sciences of man: "The distribution according to ranks or grade has a double role: it marks the gaps, hierarchizes qualities, skills and aptitudes; but it also punishes and rewards" (Foucault 1975, p. 181).

In summary, Foucault's influence on an emerging subsociology of accounting and quantification sits easily with the wider practice turn in social theory (Schatzki et al. 2001). He combines a sociology of knowledge with an analytics of control, and historical facts with a philosophical style of analysis. He shifts the focus from specific agents and their interests to the contemporaneous conditions in which practices are formed to make such interests thinkable. As Hacking (1979, p. 51) suggests, understanding how any practice, such as accounting, constitutes both objects and subjects must be one of the "most important topics in theory of knowledge." Without doubt, the accounting tributary of Foucault's influence is one of many that could have been chosen; his impact on law or the history of statistics might seem more obvious choices. Yet the positioning of accounting as a discipline in Foucault's double meaning of that term is an important reminder of its complex role in modern societies and of the specific shape it gives to governmentality. This is a fact that Weber recognized clearly and was rediscovered in the 1980s in the United Kingdom with the help of Foucault.

CRITICAL THEMES

If the Foucault effect described above can be taken as an empirical fact, no doubt requiring more formal support by way of citation analysis (such as Sallaz & Zavisca 2007 do in their

review of Bourdieu's influence), then the creation of subsociologies in fields such as accounting nevertheless leaves open many analytical and empirical issues and questions. His shifting and sometimes contradictory concerns with the historical production of meaning and categories of the normal establish Foucault as a thinker who sometimes "claimed a poet's privileges" (Rorty 1991), a fact that creates many ambiguities and tensions for some sociologists. Four interrelated themes are considered below.

Discourse and the Archaeological Method

As with the Wittgensteinian notion of language game, which has been influential within the sociology of knowledge, discourse is a primitive ontological commitment for Foucault, whose structure and method of investigation he seeks to clarify in *The Archaeology of Knowledge*. Yet the unity and boundaries of Foucault's concept of discursive formation are problematic, and it is well known that the precision and explanatory purchase of an analytical concept diminish as its scope of application expands. If discourses are pervasive, how can we determine when they stop and start? The line between discourse and nondiscourse is also undoubtedly difficult to draw (Goldstein 1984, p. 181; Fox 1998, p. 418); the registers and documents of *Discipline and Punish*, as well as maps, diagrams, accounting statements, and rankings, are both material inscriptions and bearers of ideas. Foucault does not always help by shifting the weight placed on different concepts with overlapping roles:

... what I call an apparatus is a much more general case of the *episteme*; or rather, that the *episteme* is a specifically *discursive* apparatus, whereas the apparatus in its general form is both discursive and nondiscursive, its elements being much more heterogeneous. (Foucault 1980b, p. 197)

Furthermore, Alford's (2000) empirical work on prisons suggests that Foucault illuminates discourses but not practices, where

his positivism remains empirically thin. And yet critics need to be reminded that Foucault's focus is not with implementation and institutional variety as commonly understood today, but with the conditions of possibility of what can be said and done at specific historical junctures—a Kantian style of approach that may be alien to empirical sociologists.

A second issue for Foucault's ontology of discourse and his methodological preference for documents suggests that it has its own life independent of human agency, radically divorced from the subjectivity of agents. Foucault's complex relation to structuralist thought informs his methodological imperative that statements must be described in and for themselves, not related to intentions: discourses are "anonymous and autonomous" (Hacking 1979, p. 42). This not only suggests a form of discursive functionalism, but also raises difficulties about how one is to study them (Fox 1998). If discourse is the surface manifestation of power-knowledge and is dispersed rather than flowing from a center, then what is the principle of relevance by which one element of discourse is selected over another? Foucault hardly helps when he says, "My books aren't treatises in philosophy or studies of history: at most, they are philosophical fragments put to work in a historical field of problems" (Foucault 1991b, p. 74).

Yet Hacking defends the notion of discourse as the surface manifestation of a system of thought, whose depth is empirically revealed in the archive. He argues that the job of the archaeological historian is not that of interpretation but of displaying relationships between sentences. Hence, Foucault can be positioned as a philosopher of relationality (Emirbayer 1997, Veyne 2010) in which the "relational process is prior" (Abbott 2005, p. 248). Like a Chomskyan "depth grammar," "the regularities that determine a system of thought are not a conscious part of that thought and perhaps cannot even be articulated in that thought" (Hacking 1979, p. 42). Yet clear descriptions of *epistemes* remain as elusive as those of "depth grammar," and Hacking suggests that Foucault's archaeology is less a theory than a "body of

speculations.” However, it may be a mistake to regard Foucault as articulating a methodology in the sense in which sociologists commonly understand this term (Rabinow & Rose 2003). The Kantian reading of archaeology as “a way of investigating the groundwork of bodies of knowledge” (Hacking 1986, p. 40) suggests that a history of the rules for the production of statements will not look like ordinary history (Davidson 1986, p. 222).

History and Genealogy

Although Foucault is not trying to replace or displace conventional historical work, his contribution has been disputed by historians and historical sociologists on the grounds of method and empirical rigor. First, the genealogical method inherited from Nietzsche is precommitted to a kind of critical defamiliarization of the authority of the present via accounts of rupture and discontinuity. Whereas archaeology is more descriptive in intent—laying out the relations between sentences—genealogy is more explicitly oppositional in tracing elements of the present to their contingent origins of formation. Using history as a critical resource in this way can be perceived as a theory-led approach to data. Far from clarifying, Foucault’s appeal to notions of emergence and assemblage reproduce an apparent blurring of method and substance.

Second, it is argued that Foucault operates with temporal slices and periodizations that are large and thematic, rather than inductive. This results in a history that is schematic and topographical. It has been described as a succession of synchronicities, a succession that lacks a proper theory of change, despite his efforts to renew the concept of event that had been “evacuated” by structuralist analysis (Foucault 1980a, p. 114). Although Foucault later relaxed the rigid periodization of the classical and modern age of his early work, regarding these epochal categories as thematic rather than chronological, the working conception of temporality remains problematic as an episodic succession of governing *epistemes*. Stung by the charge

of structuralism, Foucault also became clearer about his real interest in the problem of the formation of selves and individuation, which was always implicit in earlier work.

Notwithstanding these two issues, Goldstein (1984, pp. 171–72) suggests that Foucault also has considerable appeal to historians; despite the irritations of insufficient data, the indigestibility of analytical vocabulary, and the absence of actors, his work remains attractive because it defines a unique philosophical-historical orientation toward the things that have not been articulated but that nevertheless contribute to the apparent stability of objects and practices. Furthermore, historical inaccuracy of a certain kind may be less worrisome for sociologists. Goldstein argues that Foucault’s idea of discipline makes an important contribution to a sociology of bourgeois liberal professions, thus linking him back to Weber. Whereas the sociological tradition has tended to conceptualize professions as a combined product of knowledge, monopoly rights, autonomy, and service ideals, Foucault’s notion of discipline begins with the mundane administration of control, specifically over bodies. For him, professional knowledge is not a given, but is constituted from prior practices aimed at shaping and moderating behavior, not necessarily in a negative sense. These disciplines inhabit an “epistemological twilight” and consist of “groups of statements that borrow their organization from scientific models, which tend to coherence and demonstrativity, which are accepted, institutionalized, transmitted and sometimes taught as sciences” (Foucault 1969, p. 178).

According to Goldstein (1984), the implied dynamic by which practices of control give rise to formal systems of knowledge is Foucault’s major methodological and substantive contribution to the sociology of professions and knowledge. Foucault is more interested in the coming into being of proto-sciences and bodies of expertise than in fully formed professions. He contributes to an epistemological revaluation of specific archives that reveal how individuals are known and made subjects via rituals of examination, dossiers,

tables, balance sheets, and registers. Foucault's work demonstrates an ontological and epistemological respect for the mundane and material dimensions of practices. Organized routines for record keeping (like accounting) constitute both a kind of empirical knowledge of the individual and a form of "administrative objectivity" (Porter 1992). Foucault's special theoretical contribution lies in showing how professional knowledge is constituted by and originates in practice. For all the slippages of data and temporality, he offers "historians a way of conceptualising the relationship between forms of applied knowledge and their external environments" (Goldstein 1984, p. 184).

Goldstein and other enthusiasts may overstate the direction of causality from practices to knowledge; for Foucault, knowledge is not simply a reflex of efforts at control. However, there is a general appreciation of the Foucault effect as a way of writing history and doing sociology that illuminates the manner in which material technologies like accounting are a vehicle for ideas and therefore mediate aspects of their cultural context. Hacking (1986, p. 30) concurs: Although "many of Foucault's dramas have been told in calmer terms" by others, his histories are "also what I call philosophy: a way of analyzing and coming to understand the conditions of possibility for ideas—not only ideas of disease or insanity or imprisonment but also the traditional concept of epistemology, namely knowledge, and of ethics, namely power." This is the essence, if there can be one, of Foucault's "field-work in philosophy" (Rabinow & Rose 2003).

Action, Reaction, and Performativity

One of the most persistent criticisms of Foucault and those working under his influence is the absence of a recognizable theory of action. Consequently "we do not understand the process of how people ended up in . . . normalising organizations" (Friedland & Alford 1991, p. 253). Foucault's focus on archives provides no feel for the play between specific actors and multiple institutional logics—one of the central

issues in contemporary sociology. Yet Foucault is also read as demonstrating that

actors' orientations are historically and culturally produced and . . . that specifying the nature of these orientations and the processes by which they are produced raises difficult theoretical and empirical questions about interpretative, historical, and ethnographic method and about varying cognitive processes, constructs of the self, emotional dispositions, epistemological frameworks, and concepts of space, time and causation . . . (Sewell 1987, p. 168).

Sewell reads Foucault as representing a kind of inquiry that does not abstract the problem of action from its "real dialectical complexity—the question of how structurally constituted actors act in such a way that the combined effect of their actions changes the very structures that constituted them." Sewell also suggests that a proper sociology of action needs to "borrow heavily from anthropology and history," and in this respect Foucault's method has considerable appeal (Sewell 1987, pp. 169–70; 1992).

Aligning Foucault with Sewell's view of the endogeneity of agents and their interests is not to say that Foucault has a discrete theory of action that sociologists might use. For example, Fox (1998, p. 415) is skeptical that Foucault contributes to a solution of the agency/structure issue via an ontology of the body, and, Fox argues, Foucault is ambiguous on the question of the passivity and docility of people, making it impossible to take from his writings any clear view of the conditions under which some people resist efforts at control and others do not, as Friedland & Alford note. Although Foucault's later work (1984a) is increasingly focused on ethics, these imagined possibilities for autonomy and resistance do not amount to a clear theory of action.

These concerns reveal the frustrations of some sociologists, but perhaps they also miss the point. Producing a theory of action is not Foucault's purpose; he is interested in the historical conditions under which persons have

the possibility to be talked about and acted upon as actors of a specific kind. Smart (1982) argues that far from solving the structure/agency problem, Foucault helps us to understand its origins in the emergence of a sociological region that is defined by the irresolvable tension between man as both subject (agent) and object (structure). In many places, Foucault readily acknowledges that specific actions may be explained and referred to specific interests, and he does not preclude such an inquiry. He is simply not interested in it himself. He is investigating how subjects, in the sense of actorhood in general (Meyer 2010), are constituted.

Nevertheless, there is an action-theoretic Foucault effect: like Sewell and Goldstein, Espeland & Sauder (2007) argue for Foucault's contribution to an understanding of the performative and reactive character of agents in relation to rankings. They unpack the dynamics by which measures change how people make sense of situations and become more valid because behavior is increasingly directed toward them as a goal. Both resources and cognition shift gradually away from forms of knowledge that are not relevant to the ranking, despite evident misgivings and concerns by agents. Significantly, Espeland & Sauder move beyond Foucault methodologically via interviews with agents and observation of their strategies in the shadow of ranking systems. So a sociological reception of Foucault may be strongest when combined with more substantial conceptions of human agency and related dynamics of reactivity (performativity/looping), and/or grounded in ethnomethodological approaches (Moon 2005).

In summary, a large part of the tension between Foucault's work and some of the traditional preoccupations of sociology flows from his historical-philosophical approach that takes the very distinction between micro and macro levels, between agents and structure, as a disciplinary vocabulary in need of explanation. And though Foucault might side with Sewell and others against the centrality accorded to rational actor models and related theories of institutions in social explanation, he also

positions himself outside sociology as such. From his point of view, our contemporary sociological analytical apparatus can and must be traced back to the constructed autonomy of the Cartesian ego, itself in turn a contingent by-product of the power-knowledge complex of monastic rules for self-governance.

Power, Governmentality, and Institutional Theory

Foucault's conception of power within power-knowledge (*pouvoir-savoir*) has troubled many commentators (Hindess 1996). Like discourse, the idea of power as all pervasive, permeating, and "unowned" (Hacking 1986, p. 35) threatens to make the concept empty. Despite the intended counterposition to hierarchical and dyadic conceptions, it remains a relational concept of power without agents and their interests. In addition, it is argued that Foucault's emphasis on the microtechnologies of power deliberately underplays the role of the modern state (Walzer 1986; but see also Constable 1991) as a more or less coordinated ensemble of such techniques: "Foucault's power-centered analysis of modern society unhinges 'governmentality' and 'bio-power' from any particular institutional configuration" (Friedland & Alford 1991, p. 254).

Yet it may be wrong to see Foucault as engaged in a theory of power that invites comparison with Lukes and others, especially as his later interests shift toward the nature of experience (Hoy 1986b, p. 3) and the analytics of how we form a relationship with ourselves. For Foucault, power is exercised where disciplinary knowledge is formed. His approach focuses attention on the origins of the sciences of the individual at the level of a material apparatus of architecture and documents, whose reproduction, repetition, and formalization drives the formation of bodies of practical knowledge. If anything, this is a Kantian knowledge-constitutive conception of power that is not a consequence of law or social structure but that has its own specific dynamics and rationality. The contemporary

ambiguity of discipline connoting both control and knowledge is at the heart of Foucault's conception of power-knowledge, suggesting, but unfortunately not fully substantiating, the historical origins of sociology as a science of the state (Smart 1982) and validating a sociology of the small things that control people.

Foucault's sense of power-knowledge has affinities with DiMaggio & Powell's (1991) articulation of the new institutionalism in organizational analysis. Where the old institutionalism tended to emphasize values, norms, and attitudes as properties of subjects, the new emphasizes the explanatory value of classifications, routines, scripts, and schemas, a shift in ontological commitment from the cognitive basis of social order to a conception of order grounded in surface habits and practical action. For Foucault, these very routines and scripts, and their materialization in documents, are also the places where the possibilities of the immature but powerful sciences of man are created and sustained. And it is at the level of organizational habits and routines that power-knowledge can be grounded empirically as a reactive dynamic of both conformity and resistance.

Furthermore, just as the relevant unit of analysis for the new institutionalism is the organizational field, so too discursive formations and disciplines are, in Foucault's sense, trans-organizational, relational, and of a network character, notwithstanding his specific interest in prisons and hospitals. When DiMaggio & Powell (1991, p. 13) state that "Environments...are more subtle in their influence: rather than being co-opted by organizations, they penetrate the organization, creating the lenses through which actors view the world and the very categories of structure, action, and thought," there are strong affinities with Foucault's (1991a) conception of the discursive and nondiscursive technologies of governmentality that act beyond the state and across organizations. In addition, Drori et al. (2003, pp. 276-79) draw explicitly on Foucault and his followers in analyzing the role of science as a mode of global governance.

Any reconstruction of Foucault's notion of power-knowledge and its alignment with the new institutionalism in organizational sociology is likely to remain controversial. On the one hand, Foucault speaks promisingly to a tradition of organizational scholarship concerned with how external pressures become absorbed, negotiated, and embodied: "Foucault's insights about disciplinary power offer a compelling account of how cognitive, normative and affective processes mediate members' responses to environmental pressures, including multiple or coercive pressures from powerful outside organizations" (Sauder & Espeland 2009, p. 66). On the other hand, the apparent neglect of the state, the suggestion that the search for the origins or center of power is futile, and a form of oppositional critique that threatens to collapse into nihilism, notwithstanding the ethical asceticism of his later work, all remain vectors of difficulty for Foucault and his reception within sociology.

Some of the difficulties concern Foucault's political philosophy. Rorty (1991) identifies the tensions between the American and French Foucault. The former is a humanist liberal; the latter is a fully Nietzschean self standing outside of society. From the latter point of view, all liberal institutions exert power, and despite what Foucault says, the concept of power remains pejorative but empty. Relatedly, Walzer (1986) suggests that Foucault's emphasis on discourse leaves no basis for distinguishing between the prison and society at large, or between liberal and authoritarian states. His focus on the variety of practices at the micro level and self-conscious distancing from macro factors brings him into collision with both the inheritors of Marx and the defenders of liberal political theory, rendering his politics oppositional and anarchic: "Despite his emphasis on local struggles, he is largely uninterested in local victories" (Walzer 1986, p. 59), a product of an analysis of power that is implicitly functionalist (Brenner 1994). The Habermas-Foucault debate turns on similar issues (Kelly 1994, Simon 1994).

As understandable as these reactions may be, they fail, perhaps inevitably, to come to terms

with Foucault's continuous efforts to create a form of nonautonomous critical thought that is more ethical than sociological in character and that, contra Habermas, is not a kind of "quasi-judicial tribunal" (Rabinow & Rose 2003). Indeed, Foucault was very much concerned with how local victories and places of resistance, intellectual or otherwise, become forced to articulate new ways of governing. That Foucault clearly understood the necessary ambiguities, both personal and analytical, of any critical project—sociological or otherwise—is hardly the nihilistic stance that is often attributed to him.

CONCLUSIONS

This review of Foucault's work, his impact, and several critical issues of interpretation suggests that there is no ready-made and applicable Foucauldian sociology capable of exegesis and formalization. Yet there can be little empirical doubt about the way his work has been, and continues to be, a rich resource for investigations in a wide variety of subfields of sociology and beyond. Indeed, this impact is consistent with Foucault's self-understanding of his enterprise as providing tools and fragments for others. There can also be no doubt that his varied efforts to excavate the relationships linking knowledge, practice, and what Ian Hacking calls making up people are firmly within the territory of sociology and its concerns.

Nevertheless, there are methodological, empirical, and reflexive difficulties that beset any productive encounter between mainstream empirical sociology and Foucault (though such difficulties may be more pronounced in the context of North American sociology than in, say, the United Kingdom and continental Europe). These are difficulties that reflect, but are not identical with, larger incommensurabilities between poststructuralist and empirical traditions in sociology. Agger (1991, p. 126) notes that Foucault would have been comfortable with the label of amateur sociologist, notwithstanding his prestigious position at the Collège de France. He was not trying to be a sociologist

and failing, and the very distinction between the categories of amateur and professional is itself implicitly challenged in his conception of the "specific intellectual" (Kurzman & Owens 2002, p. 70). Rather, his genealogical approach focuses on how expertise in specific fields comes to have authority at specific times.

Skeptics continue to suggest that those who work with Foucault might be better served by other, more conventional sociological reference points. Some suggest that Foucauldian analysis is in the end indistinguishable from more traditional approaches. Yet this review has pointed to several places where scholars have created productive encounters between Foucault's work—the space he occupies between philosophy and sociology—and new empirical investigations. In addition, scholars have argued that a wide-ranging Foucault effect is visible in several subfields. His work has provided, if not a univocal set of methods and theory, then a distinctive set of sensibilities and a style of inquiry (Hacking 1991) that, as noted above, have opened up the phenomenon of accounting to broader social scientific investigation. At the heart of this style are Foucault's historical sociology of knowledge and the question of how the distinction between true/authorized and false/silenced statements comes to be formed in a multiplicity of fields and arenas.

My general theme isn't society but the discourse of true and false, by which I mean the correlative formation of domains and objects and of the verifiable, falsifiable discourses that bear on them; and it's not just their formation which interests me, but the effects in the real to which they are linked. (Foucault 1991b, p. 85)

Finally, any consideration of Foucault and sociology must keep in mind his underlying stance toward the sciences of the human and toward the strands within sociology that begin with Comte and Durkheim and lead to the contemporary study of social facts. Foucault's work challenges the "territoriality of sociology including its differentiation from other disciplines in the human sciences" (Agger 1991,

p. 126). This opposition is complex, embodying both humanist skepticism about the mathematization of the social, and also antiliberal disdain for the relative privileging of subjects' own accounts. Sociology in Foucault's view is inseparable from the broader sciences of the state, and his work undoubtedly contributes to our understanding of the very emergence (and

decline) of the domain of the social. At the very time when sociologists and many others are looking critically at the role of Chicago-style economic thinking in the shaping and unmaking of our developed world, Foucault's rich body of work remains a deep reservoir of ideas and insights into the history of our evolving present.

SUMMARY POINTS

1. Foucault is best understood as a philosopher-historian who is also a resource for sociological inquiry.
2. Foucault's work addresses issues of core interest to sociologists such as the formation of knowledge and disciplines, the nature and effects of practices of control, and the constitution of actors and identities.
3. Viewed in terms of a historical sociology of knowledge, his work focuses repeatedly on the historical conditions of possibility of what can be said and taken as true at specific times and places.
4. Foucault's relationship to the foundational thinkers in modern sociology (e.g., Marx, Weber) is often complex and implicit and continues to be a subject of scholarly investigation.
5. There is an identifiable Foucault effect, meaning the reception and use of his work and ideas in a wide range of subfields in sociology and beyond. One area where a Foucault effect is visible is accounting studies.
6. Foucault's conceptions of archaeology and genealogy are not methods, as that term has come to be understood in empirical sociology, and his work has a strong empirical dimension that has been a source of conflict with historians and others.
7. Over time, the theme of individuation and the constitution of actors and identities became a more explicit focus for Foucault's work, leading to his later and incomplete writings on ethics as a mode of self-transformation.
8. Foucault's views on power and power-knowledge remain controversial, but he was most interested in analyzing the "power we exert over ourselves" rather than the more conventional central, coercive, institutional conception.
9. Foucault died in 1984, leaving a body of unfinished work.

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