

THE AMERICAN UNIVERSITY IN CAIRO
POLITICAL SCIENCE DEPARTMENT

THE JOYOUS PHILOSOPHY OF MICHEL FOUCAULT

Spring semester, 2003
Ian Robert Douglas

Class hours: Thursdays, 4-6.25 pm
Office hours: Sundays, Mondays, 1.15-3 pm

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“He was a man of passion, and he himself gave the word “passion” a very precise meaning.”
Gilles Deleuze

“Do not think one has to be sad in order to be a militant, even though the thing one is fighting is abominable.”
Michel Foucault

In this course we will examine the joyful philosophy of Michel Foucault (1926-1984), late professor of "the history of systems of thought" at the Collège de France, Paris. Widely regarded as among the most important thinkers of the 20th century, Michel Foucault has nonetheless been widely misunderstood. His thought is not difficult or obscure, but rather full of passion and wonder. We will examine in Foucault's work the possibility of overcoming the nihilism of the modern age. We will place Foucault's work in the milieu of 1960's France, where it seemed for a moment that the very fundamentals of society might be overturned. His experience in activism, his uncovering of relations of power and domination, his laughter—we will explore his formative influences, his philosophy, his fears, his hopes, and his courage.

Objectives/outcomes

At the end of the course we will have:

- 1) Introduced, comprehensively, the political philosophy of Michel Foucault, focusing on his contribution to a philosophy of joy and overcoming.

- 2) Contextualized Foucault’s work within the milieu of both 1960s and 1970s revolutionary and critical theory (poststructuralism, postmodernism), and within the broader sweep of modernity.
- 3) Elaborated the permanent importance of the themes of his work, and the possibilities remaining for grounding and extending it.
- 4) Placed joy back in the centre of philosophical thought and life.

Organization and assessment

This course is a **seminar course**. What this means is that participants carry the weight of possibility equally. Everyone—whether taking the course for credit, or auditing—will be expected to take a full part in each session. Don’t expect to be taught; expect rather to teach others. Collectively we will combine our hope and our creativity, and seek to push forward in our positive understanding of our subject: Michel Foucault and the philosophy of joy.

The assessment of this course will be as follows:

Minor research paper	(due in class Week 4)	10%
Book review	(due in class Week 8)	15%
Extended research paper:		
(1st draft due in class Week 11; final peer-reviewed draft due the last day of class)		40%
Participation		35%

Written assignments will take the form of one short research paper, a book review, and an extended research paper. The first, shorter essay must be at least 1300 words in length (1600 for graduate students). The extended research paper must be at least 3000 words in length (4000 for graduate students). The book review is an undetermined length, but should comprehensively account for the book under review.

In the essay assignments your task is to respond critically and thoughtfully to a specific question, or series of questions (to be distributed). Class participation is the second major part of our assessment. Students will be asked to regularly present from chapters or readings, and will be asked to distribute (via the class webpage), summaries of these readings (one to two pages of notes only) in advance.

With regard to the final research paper, we will introduce something new. Essays are to be submitted first in a “draft form” in week 11. These essay will then be distributed among other participants for **peer review**. Having provided detailed comments and assessment on your essays, students will have until the last day of class to re-draft and complete their research papers. The paper I grade will hopefully, therefore, be a better paper than the original submitted—depending on the efforts of your peer reviewer! This should be regarded as a means of encouraging debate amongst you.

The book review assignment is to review a book taken from a distributed list. Samples of good practice will also be distributed. In essence the aim to evaluate the text, not simply

summarize it. This presupposes that you know more than the average reader about the subject of the book itself, in order to be able to comment. Therefore, the book review exercise should be seen as an ongoing project running alongside the first essay and the class.

Above all, in all assignments, you are responsible for demonstrating **originality of thought** and **comprehensiveness of understanding**. Further guidance will be given in class.

Grading

- A = Excellent command of the literature, independent and directed thinking, innovation and style. The essay/assignment would be meticulously referenced, and well-structured. A strong contribution not simply to the particular class, but overall to the student's own education and development.
- B = A good solid effort. The kind of essay that tries hard, is well sourced, but doesn't break through, or add much that is new or insightful (i.e., more a case of good repetition of an existing literature, rather than thinking/researching/striving for oneself).
- C = An honest effort, but sloppy in presentation and foresight. Some good ideas, but jumbled or confused. Remember that thought is like any sport, or any art. There is a point at which the mind becomes lean and fast, but it can only be attained through great effort. An essay that is worthy of the grade "C" is perhaps only a few hours from being worthy of a "B," and only a certain level of intensity—perhaps commitment—away from an "A." Test yourself out. Have courage.
- D = A bare pass. Just enough effort shown to warrant passing the course but not enough to impress or inspire in any way. Typical of a D grade essay would be one that simply "went through the motions", without much thought, care, or interest on the behalf of the student.
- F = Fail. No one should think of turning in a failing essay in this class.

Class policies

1. Notice something beautiful every day.
2. I expect you to value my time: be prompt and ready for class. Bring class materials with you. You should be prepared to participate.
3. You will be allowed a maximum of 3 missed classes. Miss more than 3 classes, for whatever reason, and you will take an automatic "F" for the class, as per University regulations (see the University handbook for official policy).
4. If you miss an assignment deadline you may hand in your work within 72 hrs. No work will be accepted more than 72 hrs after the deadline.
5. Essays are to be submitted typed in hard copy **in class**.
6. There are no make-ups.
7. Plagiarism (or any form of cheating) is not simply an academic offense of dishonesty; it is a personal insult to me, and I will take it as such. All cases will be referred—without exception—to the Dean of Students. The student will fail the whole course instantly.
8. Grades are non-negotiable.
9. Never be afraid to ask if something is not understood.
10. *Have courage to use your own understanding.*

Readings

There will be no textbook, but rather a “reader” of key articles, chapters, essays, and quotes. This reader can be purchased at a minimal price in the copy center near to the *sheesa* bar across from the Social Sciences entrance to Greek campus. **I expect you to read everything in the reader.** This is but a foundation, and a minimal one at that. Beyond the collection that the reader represents, students are expected to be resourceful in finding additional materials in the library and in their lives. Good research is a basic skill in any university context. You should work to master this skill—or certainly to be proficient in it. We’re here to read, explore, and to find things out. *Vous êtes embarqué!* (Pascal)

The Reader/Course outline

Background texts:

James Miller, *The Passion of Michel Foucault*

David Macey, *The Lives of Michel Foucault*

Didier Eribon, *Michel Foucault*

Understanding “Foucault”

“Active and Reactive,” Gilles Deleuze

“What is a *dispositif*?” Gilles Deleuze

“Five Facets of Nietzsche’s Ethics,” Craig Beam

“The Final Foucault and his Ethics,” Paul Veyne

“Nietzsche, Genealogy, History,” Michel Foucault

“World and Life as ‘Becoming’,” Martin Heidegger

1. The Laughter of Michel Foucault

“A Portrait of Foucault,” Gilles Deleuze

“The Laugh of Michel Foucault,” Michel de Certeau

“Candidacy Presentation: Collège de France, 1969,” Michel Foucault

“Preface to *The History of Sexuality*, Volume Two,” Michel Foucault

“Intellectuals and Power,” Michel Foucault, Gilles Deleuze

Film #1: *The Canterbury Tales*

2. The Joy of the Mundane

“Heidegger’s Ontological Ethos and the Glory of the Thing,” Frank Schreiner

“Zarathustra’s Animals,” Martin Heidegger

“The Life of Infamous Men,” Michel Foucault

“Summary Presentation of the Thought: Being as a Whole as Life and Force; the World as Chaos,”

Martin Heidegger

“On the Death of Man and Superman,” Gilles Deleuze

“The Plane of Immanence,” Gilles Deleuze, Félix Guattari

Film #2: *Marat/Sade*

3. The Joy of Folly

“Madness as the Absence of Work,” Michel Foucault

“Suspensions Concerning the “Humanization” of Beings,” Martin Heidegger

Film #3: *The Arabian Nights*

4. The Joy of Sex

“Desire and Pleasure,” Gilles Deleuze

“Sade: Sergeant of Sex,” Michel Foucault

“An Ethics of Pleasure,” Michel Foucault

“Nietzsche’s ‘Biological’ Interpretation of Knowledge,” Martin Heidegger

Film #4: *Fearless*

5. The Joy of Speech

“The Word *Parrhesia*,” Michel Foucault

“*Parrhesia* in the Care of the Self,” Michel Foucault

“How Much Does it Cost for Reason to Tell the Truth,” Michel Foucault

“The Child’s New Speech (Bataillan Drama, Nietzschean Cliché),” John Russon

“Breaking Things Open, Breaking Words Open,” Gilles Deleuze

Film #5: *Cool Hand Luke*

6. The Joy of Transgression

“Preface to Transgression,” Michel Foucault

“Kant’s Doctrine of the Beautiful. It’s Misinterpretation by Schopenhauer and Nietzsche,” Martin Heidegger

“The geometry of the incommunicable: Madness,” Michel Serres

“The New Interpretation of Sensuousness and the raging Discordance between Art and Truth,” Martin Heidegger

“Revolutionary Action: ‘Until Now’,” Michel Foucault

Film #6: *Salo, Or, 120 days of Sodom*

7. The Joy of Power

“Power Affects the Body,” Michel Foucault

“Body/Power,” Michel Foucault

“The Eye of Power,” Michel Foucault

“Nietzsche and the Ethos of Power,” Robert Nichols

Film #7: *Vagabond*

8. The Joy of Suicide

“The Simplest of Pleasures,” Michel Foucault

“Sade: Sergeant of Sex,” Michel Foucault

“Passion According to Werner Schroeter,” Michel Foucault

“Spinoza: Suicide and the Ethics of Human Bondage,” George J. Nathan

Film #8: *Vanishing Point*

9. The Joy of Nomadism

“World and Life as ‘Becoming’,” Martin Heidegger

“The Concept of Chaos,” Martin Heidegger

“Nomad Thought,” Gilles Deleuze

Film #1: *My Own Private Idaho*

10. The Joy of Friendship

“Polemics, Politics, and Problematizations: Interview with Michel Foucault,” Michel Foucault, Paul Rabinow

“Friendship as a Way of Life,” Michel Foucault

“The Possibility/Impossibility of a Foucauldian Ethic,” Thomas R. Flynn

Film #9: *Decameron*

11. The Joy of Life

“Sex, Power, and the Politics of Identity,” Michel Foucault

“Immanence: A Life,” Gilles Deleuze

“Life as a Work of Art,” Gilles Deleuze

“Nietzsche—Foucault—Exemplars,” David Goicoechea

Film #10: *Foucault Who?*

12. The Joy of Philosophy

“Nietzsche,” Gilles Deleuze

“The Masked Philosopher,” Michel Foucault

“The Ethics of the Concern for Self as a Practice of Freedom,” Michel Foucault

“The Child’s New Time: (Heidegger’s Nietzsche: Time Beyond Revenge),” Robert Nicholls

“Foucault’s Ethos of Atheistic Glory,” David Goicoechea



“ .. what blindness, what deafness, what density of ideology would have to weigh me down to prevent me from being interested in what is probably the most crucial subject to our existence, that is to say the society in which we live, the economic relations within which it functions, and the system of power which defines the regular forms and the regular permissions and prohibitions of our conduct. The essence of our life consists, after all, of the political functioning of the society in which we find ourselves.”

—michel foucault