

Foucault and the Archaeology of Transhumanism

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Abstract : During the early part of his intellectual and academic career (1950s and 1960s), Michel Foucault developed an interest for what we can call the 'anthropological question', or how our modernity deals with human nature from an epistemological standpoint. The great originality of Foucault's thought here lies in the fact that he approaches this question not from the perspective of this 'sovereign subject' (that has characterized the History of Western thought) he wishes to disclose and 'denounce', but rather at the level of discourses and the way they constitute who we are, so to speak. This led him, in turn, to formulate a series of thought-provoking statements during his so-called 'archaeological period' of the 1960s concerning what we call 'man' in the West, such as that he is an 'invention of recent date' (as a proper object of concern and reflection), and, perhaps more importantly, that he might disappear in the near future, 'like a face drawn in sand at the edge of the sea'. Foucault is following on the footsteps of Nietzsche in that regard, who had famously announced in the 19th ce. the 'death of God' and the need for the future generations to surpass (so to speak) the traditional 'Christian-centred' Western conception of the human. While Foucault exposed such insights more than half a century ago, they appear to be more actual than ever today with the development and rise in popularity of intellectual movements such as Transhumanism and Posthumanism, which seek to question and propose an alternative to the concepts of 'man' or 'human nature' in our culture. They rely for that on the same assumption as Foucault and Nietzsche that those concepts (and the meaning we attribute to them) have become 'obsolete' as it is and thus must be overcome (at a conceptual, but also a more practical level). Hence, those movements not only echo the important Foucauldian reflection of the 1950s and 1960s on the 'anthropological question' but seem to have been literally announced by it, so to speak. The aim of this paper will therefore be to show the relevance of Foucault (and in particular his archaeological method) in understanding the nature of Transhumanism (and Posthumanism), for instance, by analysing and assessing it as a form of discourse that is literally reshaping the way we understand ourselves as human beings in our (post)modern age, drawing for that on a number of key texts including from the early productions of Foucault.

Keywords : foucault, nietzsche, archaeology, transhumanism, posthumanism

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