
**BRIEF CONSIDERATIONS ON THE WORK OF MICHEL FOUCAULT
ON THE CENTENARY OF HIS BIRTH**

Celso Luís Levada,^{*(3)} Huemerson Maceti,^(1,2) Rosangela Oliveira Colabone⁽³⁾

Ivan José Lautenschleguer,⁽¹⁾ Miriam de Magalhães O Levada⁽¹⁾

¹Hermínio Ometto Foundation FHO Uniararas, Brazil.

²Puríssimo Coração de Maria School / Rio Claro, Brazil.

³Air Force Academy of Pirassununga, Brazil.

Article Received: 25 August 2026, Article Revised: 15 September 2026, Published on: 05 October 2026

***Corresponding Author: Celso Luís Levada**

Air Force Academy of Pirassununga, Brazil.

Doi: <https://doi-doi.org/101555/ijarp.9443>

ABSTRACT

Paul Michel Foucault was born in Poitiers, France, on October 15, 1926. He passed away in Paris on June 25, 1984, at the age of 57. Foucault stands as one of the most influential intellectual figures of the twentieth century. A philosopher, historian of ideas, social theorist, and literary critic, he held the Chair of the History of Systems of Thought at the prestigious Collège de France, where he taught from 1970 until his death. His oeuvre rigorously interrogates the relationship between power and knowledge, demonstrating how these forces intertwine and operate as instruments of social control through institutional practices. Although frequently associated with post-structuralism and postmodernism, Foucault himself rejected such categorizations, preferring to describe his intellectual project as a critical history of modernity. The reach of his ideas extended far beyond academic circles, shaping not only philosophical and social scientific discourse but also inspiring political movements and activist initiatives, which drew upon his analyses to challenge mechanisms of domination and articulate strategies of resistance. This article offers a concise overview of Foucault's work in commemoration of the centenary of his birth.

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF FOUCAULT

This brief biography was drawn from FAUBION⁽¹⁾ and ERIBON⁽²⁾, who state that Paul-Michel Foucault was born on October 15, 1926, in Poitiers, France, the son of surgeon Paul Foucault and Anna Malapert. He came from a family marked by medical tradition, but chose philosophy and became one of the most influential thinkers of the 20th century. In 1946, he

began studying Philosophy at the École Normale Supérieure and was influenced by Jean Hyppolite, who introduced him to Hegel, as well as Nietzsche, Freud, and Marx. He also graduated in Psychology in 1949, enriching his interdisciplinary work. He had a significant impact on the human sciences by studying the relationships between power, knowledge, and social institutions. Foucault came from a family of doctors and grew up in a bourgeois household. His work crossed disciplinary boundaries, influencing philosophy, sociology, psychology, and cultural studies. In 1946, he entered the École Normale Supérieure, where he was taught by Jean Hyppolite and Georges Canguilhem. Foucault had a brief experience with the French Communist Party but later distanced himself. He taught at several universities and, in 1970, became a professor at the Collège de France. His most famous works include *History of Madness*, *The Order of Things*, and *Discipline and Punish*. Foucault also stood out for his debates on prisons, sexuality, and human rights. Nearly four decades after his death, Michel Foucault's legacy continues to influence research and discussions about the mechanisms that organize contemporary society. His personal life and political activism were always linked to his theoretical production, covering areas such as social sciences, philosophy, cultural studies, feminism, and Queer theory. Concepts such as discourse, power-knowledge, and genealogy are central to contemporary research. Foucault is recognized as a major critic of modernity and social control, actively engaging in social and political causes. In 1971, he founded the Groupe d'Information sur les Prisons (GIP) to denounce abuses in the French prison system. He also became involved in human rights campaigns, fighting against torture and repression in countries such as Iran and Poland. In 1978, he followed the Iranian Revolution, which he saw as a new form of "political spirituality." Although he was interested in its revolutionary potential, Foucault was criticized for not foreseeing the authoritarian nature of the Islamic regime. He supported social movements for immigrants, sexual minorities, and exploited workers, defending the marginalized. Foucault viewed politics as relations of power within institutions such as prisons, hospitals, and schools, leading to the notion of biopolitics and biopower, which describe how the modern state regulates populations. For him, philosophy should be a critical practice, revealing mechanisms of domination. His activism inspired civil rights movements, queer theory, and prison activism, showing that intellectuals must be active participants in social struggles. In 1978, Foucault was a correspondent for the newspaper *Corriere della Sera* in Iran, during a critical moment of the revolt against Shah Reza Pahlavi, the Black Friday massacre, when thousands of protesters were killed. His coverage focused on the collective energy of the streets and led to the interpretation of the Iranian Revolution as a form of "political

spirituality.” For the philosopher, the mobilization in Iran was different from Western revolutions, showing that uprisings could emerge from spiritual and cultural values, not only from economic or political disputes. This generated controversy, with French intellectuals accusing Foucault of naivety for not foreseeing that the Islamic regime after the Shah’s fall would become authoritarian. They criticized his analysis for romanticizing religious mobilization without considering its political implications. In interviews collected in *The Enigma of Revolt*, Foucault acknowledged the limits of his interpretation but remained interested in new forms of insurrection. His experience in Iran is a landmark in his intellectual trajectory.

INTRODUCTION

Michel Foucault developed two main methods: archaeology and genealogy. In the 1960s, archaeology analyzed the historical conditions that allow certain regimes of knowledge, showing the rules that define what can be said in each field of knowledge. From the 1970s onward, inspired by Nietzsche, Foucault turned to genealogy, which investigates how knowledge and power are related. He understood power not as something centralized or merely repressive, but as a diffuse and productive network, capable of creating knowledge, subjectivities, and behaviors. In his lectures at the Collège de France, he introduced the concept of governmentality, expanding the analysis of power beyond the State to include economic management, security, and the administration of social life. This concept is connected to biopolitics, which shows how modern power directly affects life itself. Foucault’s work was the target of numerous criticisms in philosophy and the social sciences. Jürgen Habermas, for example, argued that the Foucauldian approach falls into a form of “cryptonormativity,” since it denounces power structures without presenting explicit normative criteria to support such critique. Other scholars also highlight the absence of a more defined normative political project, as well as questioning the historical rigor of certain analyses. Despite these objections, Foucault’s thought remains deeply influential and continues to be debated and reinterpreted across various fields of knowledge. His reflections on power, knowledge, and subjectivity shaped areas such as philosophy, sociology, history, cultural studies, and political theory. Moreover, they contributed to the advancement of gender studies — especially in authors like Judith Butler — and impacted criminology, public health, and contemporary social theory. His interdisciplinary and critical perspective continues to be mobilized in the analysis of institutions, social practices, and forms of governance, proving essential for understanding the challenges of today’s world. Michel

Foucault highlighted how institutions shape practices of control over individuals. The philosopher observed striking similarities in the treatment applied to groups considered marginal or vulnerable: the insane, prisoners, foreigners, soldiers, and children. What they share, he argued, is being regarded with suspicion and subjected to rules of confinement in specialized, secure facilities. These spaces — asylums, prisons, barracks, and schools — were organized according to similar models inspired by monastic traditions. Foucault referred to these structures as “disciplinary institutions”, designed to impose norms and restrict individual freedom (PAULA CAIXETA ⁽³⁾). Foucault publicly acknowledged his homosexuality as part of his philosophical work, arguing that the homosexual experience should be lived ethically, aesthetically, and politically. He supported the gay movement in France during the 1970s and 1980s and influenced queer theory. Foucault believed that homosexuality was not limited to sexual practices but should be seen as a way of establishing new relationships of friendship and affection, proposing that the gay movement be more than a struggle for sexual freedom. He viewed homosexuality as resistance to social norms and to the power that controls bodies and desires. For him, embracing homosexuality was a political act that challenged norms and allowed for new subjectivities. His ideas continue to influence LGBTQIA+ movements and studies on sexual and gender diversity. Foucault not only took pride in being homosexual but also transformed it into a powerful philosophical and political project (ERIBON ⁽²⁾).

PHILOSOPHICAL AFFILIATION

According to Rebello Cardoso (4), Michel Foucault did not adhere to a single philosophical school, but instead built a hybrid and critical thought, marked by the influence of Nietzsche and Heidegger, by radical materialism, and by the idea of philosophy as a way of life. His work unfolds in three major phases — archaeology, genealogy, and ethics — always questioning the forms of knowledge, power, and subjectivity. In the archaeological phase, Foucault sought to understand how discourses are formed and organized, revealing the historical conditions that make certain knowledge possible. In the genealogy, inspired by Nietzsche, he investigated the relations between knowledge and power, showing how social practices and institutions shape bodies and behaviors. Finally, in the ethical phase, Foucault turned to the theme of subjectivity and the care of the self, exploring how individuals can construct autonomous modes of existence in the face of forces of normalization and control. In summary, Foucault’s philosophical affiliation is multiple: he does not bind himself to one school, but articulates Nietzsche, Heidegger, radical materialism, and the classical tradition to

build a critical, historical, and practical philosophy. His conception of philosophy is not limited to theory, but extends as ethical and political practice. Examples of this are the valorization of friendship and care of the self, which appear as forms of resistance to biopower and as paths to autonomy. This perspective brings his work closer to the ancient tradition, in which philosophy was inseparable from a way of life, reaffirming that to think is also to transform oneself and to transform the world. In the so-called archaeological phase, Foucault (4) dedicated himself to investigating the historical conditions that make possible the emergence of certain discourses and forms of knowledge. His goal was not to analyze the content of ideas themselves, but to understand the invisible rules that structure thought in each era. A central example is the book *The Order of Things* (1966), in which Foucault shows how different historical periods — the Renaissance, the Classical Age, and Modernity — have distinct ways of organizing knowledge. He calls these structures epistemes, that is, systems of thought that define what can be considered true or false at a given moment. Another fundamental text is *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (1969), where Foucault makes explicit his methodology. He rejects the idea that the history of ideas is a continuous line of progress and argues that discourses are formed through ruptures, discontinuities, and reorganizations. Archaeology, therefore, is a method to reveal these historical discontinuities and to show that knowledge is never neutral, but always conditioned by social and institutional practices. This phase prepares the ground for genealogy, since by identifying the conditions of possibility of discourses, Foucault opens the way to investigate how they relate to power. In genealogy, Foucault draws directly on Nietzsche to investigate how power infiltrates social practices and shapes bodies and behaviors. The focus is not only on ideas, but on the concrete relations between knowledge and power. In *Discipline and Punish* (1975), he analyzes the transition from public and violent punishments to more subtle forms of discipline, showing how prisons, schools, and barracks function as devices of control. In the series *The History of Sexuality* (from 1976 onward), Foucault reveals that power not only represses, but also produces discourses and subjectivities. The concept of biopower emerges here, indicating how modern states began to manage life, regulating populations and bodies through policies of health, sexuality, and normalization. Genealogy, therefore, shows that power is not only repressive, but productive: it creates knowledge, practices, and forms of subjectivity (Rebello Cardoso⁽⁴⁾).

MAJOR BOOKS BY MICHEL FOUCAULT

1. ARAÚJO ⁽⁵⁾ states that *History of Madness* (1961) analyzes how society treated madness from the Middle Ages through the eighteenth century. It shows that the exclusion of the “mad” was not natural, but rather a social construction that established boundaries between reason and unreason. Madness developed its own history according to different periods and cultural boundaries. This can be inferred from the literature on the subject, particularly from Michel Foucault’s work *History of Madness*, published in 1961. The social representation of madness is shaped by cultural, religious, political, and philosophical factors.
2. According to TAVIRA ⁽⁶⁾, *The Birth of the Clinic* (1963) examines how modern medicine created the “clinical gaze,” transforming hospitals and diagnoses into instruments of power over bodies. In *The Birth of the Clinic*, Foucault seeks to understand the anatomico-clinical rationality that permeated the consolidation of medical knowledge in modernity, with the main object of investigation being the disease or the body of the person who becomes ill. Foucault situates the birth of the Clinic at the end of the eighteenth century, when modern medicine underwent a fundamental transformation in the organization of its knowledge and practice, now presented through a presumed empiricism that placed it in the prestigious position of a Science. For the philosopher, this structural change did not occur as a result of conceptual refinement or the use of more advanced technical means, but rather because of a change in a particular linguistic configuration that constitutes medical discourse.
3. According to GONÇALVES ⁽⁷⁾, the central issue addressed in Foucault’s work *The Order of Things* is to understand the conditions of existence and the possibility of thought. He shows that thought has a history and can only be understood as coherent within that history. To explore this issue further, it is necessary to analyze concepts such as episteme (in its three formulations), the historical a priori, the analytic of finitude, and the death of man. From this perspective, it becomes easier to understand how Foucault’s thought fits into a non-essentialist philosophical tradition, in which our practices, beliefs, and desires depend on external and contingent conditions in order to exist.
4. According to VASCONCELOS ⁽⁸⁾, in *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (1969), Michel Foucault challenges us to question established structures of knowledge and invites us to explore new ways of understanding the world. Using accessible and provocative language, the author takes us on an intellectual journey that encourages us to rethink the foundations of human knowledge. He explains his method of historical analysis of discourses, showing how ideas do not emerge in isolation, but rather within specific rules and conditions.

5. According to SILVA ⁽⁹⁾, *Discipline and Punish* (1975) presents a study of the evolution of punitive practices. In this work, Foucault examines criminal law under European absolutist regimes and compares it with the democratic regimes that emerged at the end of the eighteenth century. He describes how criminal offenses have been historically understood, highlighting two forms of power: one under absolutist regimes, in which punishment is severe and serves to reaffirm power, and another following the French Revolution, characterized as a disciplinary society focused on surveillance and discipline. Under absolutism, criminal law is exercised by a centralized judiciary subordinate to the king, in which every offense is considered an act against centralized power. Punishment is a crucial mechanism for reinforcing this power.
6. According to CARVALHO ⁽¹⁰⁾, *The History of Sexuality* analyzes how discourses about sex and the body are used to exercise power. The work shifts the focus from repression to the production of discourses about sexuality. It is not merely a matter of silencing or prohibiting, but of creating ways to speak about and classify bodies and desires. This new perspective shows that power operates not only by denying but also by multiplying discourses that shape behaviors and identities. Its influence extended to fields such as philosophy, sociology, anthropology, and gender studies, allowing for new understandings of power and subjectivity. Sexuality is understood as a historical construction, questioning categories that appear to be natural. It should be understood as a field of dispute involving institutions such as medicine, religion, education, and law, reflecting power relations within society.
7. FONSECA ⁽¹¹⁾, in *The Birth of Biopolitics* (1978–1979), analyzes how liberalism and neoliberalism became conditions of intelligibility for biopolitics, that is, the modern way of governing the lives of populations. Biopolitics refers to the power that regulates aspects of life such as birth rates, mortality, and health. Governmentality is a political form that organizes the state around the management of the population. Liberalism is not merely an economic doctrine but also a way of understanding biopolitics. Neoliberalism, as analyzed by Foucault, shows how the German and American versions transform the relationship between the state and the economy. Biopolitics is a modern way of governing that focuses on the administration of life and is connected to governmentality, which combines forms of knowledge and techniques to manage collective life.
8. CAMATI ⁽¹²⁾ discusses *Security, Territory, Population* (1977–1978) by Michel Foucault, which addresses the development of modern governmentality, highlighting the transition from sovereign power, based on punishment, to biopower, which focuses on regulating the life of the population. He examines security mechanisms, the reason of state, and the role of

the police as forms of social control. The focus of the modern state is on the population rather than solely on territory. Sovereign power involves the right to punish, whereas biopower is concerned with preventing risks and managing life. Foucault reveals how modern power transforms itself in order to manage risks and organize community life. The reason of state is used to justify practices that strengthen governmental authority. The police play a role that is not merely repressive, but also functions as a tool for surveillance and management, ensuring order and productivity within society. This shift reflects the evolution of modern governance.

9. According to BARBÃO ⁽¹³⁾, *The Order of Discourse* (1971) is the inaugural lecture delivered by Michel Foucault at the Collège de France, in which he demonstrates that discourse is never free, since its production is always controlled, selected, and regulated by mechanisms of power and exclusion. Foucault shows that discourse is not neutral; rather, it is an object of struggle and power. In other words, in every society, discourse is regulated by procedures that ward off its potential dangers and determine who may speak, what may be said, and under what conditions. Foucault wrote this work during a period of social and political change, questioning power and its relationships. He analyzes discourse as a method and suggests strategies for understanding language.

10. According to MAGNELLI and SONEGHET ⁽¹⁴⁾, *Confessions of the Flesh*, published posthumously in 2018, is the fourth volume of Michel Foucault's *History of Sexuality* series. The book analyzes how early Christianity shaped new forms of subjectivation, particularly through the relationship between sexuality, truth, and practices of confession. It is the publication of a manuscript written between 1980 and 1982 and partially revised by Foucault before his death in 1984. The central theme is the emergence of a new experience of the flesh and sexuality within Christianity, distinct from the Greco-Roman tradition. The book is important because it makes explicit the relationships among the first centuries of Christianity, Antiquity, and Modernity regarding ways of thinking about sex. It also contributes to the broader context of the *History of Sexuality*.

DISCUSSION

Michel Foucault criticized traditional ideas about power, knowledge, and truth, showing how they are linked to the structure of society. His work influenced fields such as psychology, medicine, law, education, and cultural studies. He believed that power is present in everyday life and not limited to governments, stating that institutions like prisons and schools control behaviors. For Foucault, knowledge is a form of power that helps in understanding the world. He did not label himself as a “structuralist” or “postmodernist” and analyzed how, since the

18th and 19th centuries, populations began to be studied and managed, changing social organization. Power can be oppressive, but it also generates resistance. Foucault embraced his homosexuality as part of his philosophy, seeing sexuality as a space of freedom. In works such as *The History of Sexuality*, he treated homosexual experience not as a fixed identity but as an ethical and political choice, resisting the power that normalizes desires and bodies.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

Michel Foucault concluded his career as a thinker who questioned the traditional understanding of power, knowledge, and subjectivity. He presented a political philosophy that considers power as a dispersed network and the ethics of “care of the self” as a form of resistance to control. In the 1960s, he analyzed the formation of discourses and regimes of truth, revealing that there are no universal truths, but rather historical conditions that influence thought. In the 1970s, inspired by Nietzsche, he investigated social practices and institutions that shape individuals. In his later years, he deepened his study of the ethics of self-care, showing how institutions affect bodies and subjectivities, impacting current debat

REFERÊNCIAS BIBLIOGRÁFICAS

1. FAUBION, James - Britannica - Michel Foucault French philosopher and historian, Biography available in <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Michel-Foucault/Foucaults-influence>
2. ERIBON, Didier. Biography of Michel Foucault, 1926–1984. Translated by Marcos Santarrita. São Paulo, Brazil: Companhia das Letras, 1990. Original book in French available at https://journals.openedition.org/lectures/5216?lang=fr&utm_source=copilot.com
3. PAULA CAIXETA, Vanessa Biographical profile: Michel Foucault, available in <http://www.ded.ufla.br/generoesexualidade-ei/imagens/foucault.pdf>
4. REBELLO CARDOSO, Hélio – available in Education and Philosophy Uberlândia, v. 26, n. 51, p. 185-206, Brazil 2012.
5. ARAÚJO, J. R. Santos, The History of Madness Through the Centuries: From Foucault to Modernity”, available in <https://rsdjournal.org/index.php/rsd/article/view/470051e>
6. TAVIRA, L. Vasques, The Birth of the Clinic” Foucault, available in <https://encenasaudemental.com/series/o-nascimento-da-clinica-em-foucault-um-poder-saber-sobre-a-vida>

7. GONÇALVES, Daniel Luis. Analyzing the concept of episteme in Michel Foucault. *Argumentos Journal of Philosophy*, Fortaleza, year 10, n. 20, p. 152, Brazil 2018.
8. VASCONCELOS, E. Dias- The Archaeology of Knowledge Michel Foucault, available in https://www.recantodasletras.com.br/artigos-de-educacao/5903820?utm_source=copilot.com
9. SILVA, Josué Pereira. "Re-reading Discipline and Punish 40 Years Later. *Lua Nova: Journal of Culture and Politics* [online]."2016, available in: <https://doi.org/10.1590/0102-6445139-171/97>
10. CARVALHO, Guilherme Paiva de; Oliveira, Aryanne S. Queiroz de. "Discourse, Power, and sexuality in" Foucault. *Revista Dialectus*, ano 4, n. 11, 2017.
11. FONSECA, João Paulo, "Power, Biopolitics, and Governmentality in Michel Foucault. Graduate Dissertation in Sociology at the Federal University of Minas Gerais.", text available in <https://repositorio.ufmg.br/bitstreams>
12. CAMATI, Odair. "An analysis of the reason of state in Michel Foucault based on the course Security, Territory, PopulationDoi:10.15448/1983-4012.2015.1.18492, available in https://www.academia.edu/43511602/FOUCAULT_M_Seguranca_territorio_popaulaut m_source=copilot.com.
13. BARBÃO, Marcelo. Site: www.ciberfil.hpg.ig.com.br, available in https://scienceslanguage.eca.usp.br/Foucaultorderofdiscourse.pdf?utm_source=copilot.com
14. MAGNELLI, André, and SONEGHET, Lucas. "The Confessions of the Flesh, Volume IV of The History of Sexuality: A Synthesis. *Humanities Atelier*."2018, text available in https://www.academia.edu/43326130/As_Confisses_da_Carne_tomo_IV_da_HistC3B3ria_da_Sexualidade_uma_sintese?utm_source=copilot.com