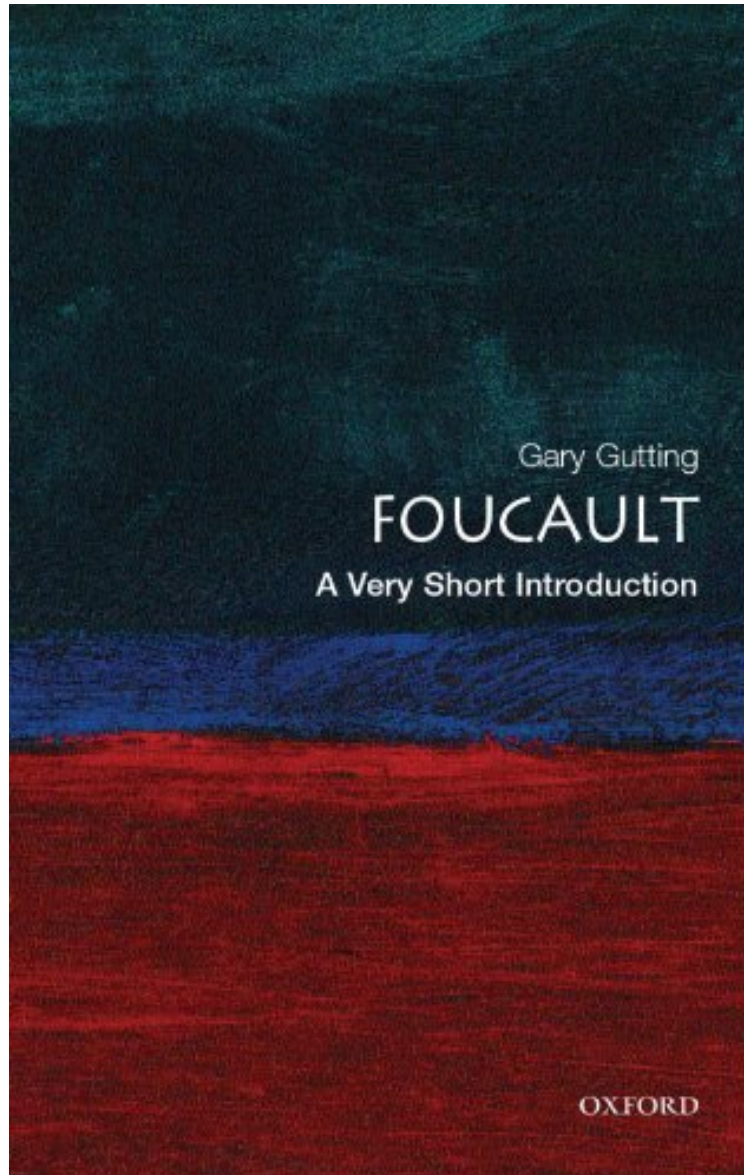


[FREE] Foucault: A Very Short Introduction (Very Short Introductions)

Foucault: A Very Short Introduction (Very Short Introductions)

Von Gary Gutting

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Von Gary Gutting : Foucault: A Very Short Introduction (Very Short Introductions) before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Foucault: A Very Short Introduction (Very Short Introductions):

KundenrezensionenHilfreichste Kundenrezensionen0 von 0 Kunden fanden die folgende Rezension hilfreich. Knowledge is not made for understanding; it is made for cuttingVon AnkaMichel Foucault is among the most

important philosophers of the 20th century, and a rather difficult one to survey his works and thoughts in an introductory overview. This difficulty has several reasons, one is indicated as Foucault himself asked his readers: 'Do not ask who I am and do not ask me to remain the same.' ('Archaeology of Knowledge') ' obviously, he did not intend to remain the same throughout his works. In addition, he apparently admitted to American philosopher John Searle that his writing was expected to be partly incomprehensible to be taken seriously. Not least, in his works Foucault was tackling the historical nature of knowledge and power, analysing it e. g. in his 'archaeology of knowledge'. For a very short introduction, there is thus a lot of ground to cover. The first three chapters are concerning Foucault's life, literature, politics and his own involvement in political activism. It is detailed that Foucault is as hard to pin down personally as from his works - partly, this may not come as a surprise: "we know too little about Foucault's personal life to do anything more than speculate about its relation to his work." (p. 4) While these chapters may come across as a somewhat slow start to the Foucaultian topics, they in fact all revolve around the inherent ambiguities and possibilities for self-expression and revolt, which will become later again important in Foucault's 'ultimately political agenda' (p. 9) of his 'histories'. Consecutive chapters then cover thematically all that Foucault is best known for: archaeology, genealogy, power, madness, discipline, sex. The presentation in the chapters on archaeology, genealogy, and the 'masked philosopher' get to the core of Foucault's thought. Foucault traces back to the Kantian question on knowledge and its possibility, and his ideas are well outlined here. Foucault deviates from Kant and his search for metaphysical constraints of logic and understanding by shifting attention to the historical and social constraints of understanding (Foucault's 'epistemes'), thereby replacing logic and its limitations by power and its cognitive control mechanisms. Knowledge becomes something else than insight, it is rather the effect of regulative norms of a discourse. Foucault thus still sets out with the concept of truth but puts it to the test in the face of intellectual history: 'His archaeologies show how it is often relative to the contingent historical frameworks it is supposed to transcend, his genealogies show how it is entwined with the power and domination from which it is supposed to free us.' (p. 109) The archaeological method and genealogical approach not only describe the origin of historical contingencies, but of historical contingencies masked as necessities. Accordingly, a genealogy aims further than the description of historical contingencies and is implicitly political, as it also uncovers the possibilities so far neglected. Foucault is not an easy thinker to introduce. The book is at some points a somewhat difficult to follow because it provides both a summary and an exegesis of Foucault. It is overall well written, but may need some careful reading as, despite the topical organisation, several strands of Foucault's (developing) thoughts contact again at later topics in his work. An aspect that is largely and probably somewhat surprisingly lacking is the evaluation of the reception and influence Foucault had and has on the disciplines he analysed. This is certainly true for his impulses in historical epistemology, but also for historical and philosophical analysis of life sciences, or the evaluation of his work by Jürgen Habermas. Yet, the text repeatedly discusses and critically evaluates Foucault's positions. Probably the author wanted to give an intrinsic analysis, rather than an extrinsic one through the eyes of Foucault's readers (now and then). Under this premise, the analysis of Foucault's work is condensed and inviting to look for the original texts behind these 110 pages. After all, with any interest in the subjects of Foucault, one can't escape reading his original works.

Kurzbeschreibung Foucault is one of those rare philosophers who has become a cult figure. Born in 1926 in France, over the course of his life he dabbled in drugs, politics, and the Paris SM scene, all whilst striving to understand the deep concepts of identity, knowledge, and power. From aesthetics to the penal system; from madness and civilisation to avant-garde literature, Foucault was happy to reject old models of thinking and replace them with versions that are still widely debated today. A major influence on Queer Theory and gender studies (he was openly gay and died of an AIDS-related illness in 1984), he also wrote on architecture, history, law, medicine, literature, politics and of course philosophy, and even managed a best-seller in France on a book dedicated to the history of systems of thought. Because of the complexity of his arguments, people trying to come to terms with his work have desperately sought introductory material that makes his theories clear and accessible for the beginner. Ideally suited for the Very Short Introductions series, Gary Gutting presents a comprehensive but non-systematic treatment of some highlights of Foucault's life and thought. Beginning with a brief biography to set the social and political stage, he then tackles Foucault's thoughts on literature, in particular the avant-garde scene; his philosophical and historical work; his treatment of knowledge and power in modern society; and his thoughts on sexuality.

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