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[Foucault, Michel / Blackburn's Oxford Dictionary of Philosophy](#)

Foucault, Michel (1926-1984) French historian and philosopher. Born in Poitiers, Foucault was educated at the École Normale Supérieure in Paris, taught in Germany, Sweden, and Algiers, and held chairs at Clermont-Ferrand and Vincennes, before being appointed professor of the history of systems of thought at the Collège de France. His work ranged widely across history, philosophy, psychoanalysis, and linguistics, and was extremely influential in raising new questions about the historical character of the categories of social experience. Foucault had a special interest in the use of science and reason as instruments of *power*, in domains such as medicine and criminology. His earliest work, *Folie et déraison* (1961, trs. as *Madness and Civilization*, 1965) charted western attitudes to the insane, and had an enormous influence in diagnosing what might seem to be progressive and humane improvements in treatment as one aspect of increasing social and political control. Indeed, his perception of all social relations as fundamentally relationships of power, and usually infused with a generous amount of sadism, has led to it being said that he replaced the distinction between subject and object with that between subject and abject. Foucault's own life sometimes luridly reflected this enthusiasm, contributing to his death as an early victim of AIDS. Subsequent works includes *Les Mots et les choses* (1966, trs. as *The Order of Things*, 1970), *L'Archéologie du savoir* (1969, trs. as *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, 1972), *Surveiller et punir* (1975, trs. as *Discipline and Punish*, 1977), and the three-volume *Histoire de la sexualité* (1976-88, trs. as *History of Sexuality*, 1979-88), whole final volumes were completed just before his death.

Reference:

Blackburn, Simon. *Oxford Dictionary of Philosophy*. Oxford & New York: Oxford University Press, 1996. (pp. 144)

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