



Book Review

Mariana Valverde (2017) *Michel Foucault*. Oxon: Routledge.

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In this short and accessible volume, Mariana Valverde adopts the unenviable task not only of surveying Michel Foucault's contributions to criminology and criminal justice but also of summarising relevant parts of the voluminous Foucaultian scholarship which has appeared since his death. Despite some minor critiques to which I shall return, the book is an important contribution and particularly a good reference tool.

Valverde explains Foucault's relevance to criminologists by highlighting his distinctive focus on practices—specifically practices through which power is exercised—in contrast to the focus on acts (who committed a particular act, which acts are harmful?), identities (why did an individual commit a harmful act, what does their offending say about their nature?), or institutions (how can we craft criminal justice institutions that respond effectively to crime?), which continue to frame much criminological inquiry. This distinction is central to Valverde's interpretation of Foucault because, as she contends, it helps us think differently about the genesis and development of these practices, and continuities in the exercise of power across different contexts.

As might be expected, Valverde covers familiar ground throughout, canvassing the key ideas of surveillance, disciplinary power, biopolitics, and governmentality. She also discusses some of the context out of which these ideas developed, such as Foucault's political activity. In particular, Valverde devotes two chapters to governmentality and related ideas of security, police, responsabilisation, and risk, including their subsequent development by other scholars. This sustained attention suggests that governmentality is criminology's key inheritance from Foucault, and ought to remain at the core of Foucaultian-informed criminological scholarship – a position that some may disagree with.

The most interesting and original discussions in the book appear in Chapters 6 and 7, where Valverde considers recently published, or long overlooked, works by Foucault. In Chapter 6, dedicated to Foucault's recently published lectures, *The Punitive Society*, Valverde charts the development of Foucault's thought on key ideas such as discipline and power. This ought to be of particular interest to criminologists and criminal justice scholars as it showcases a Foucault testing out his ideas and finding the best way of articulating them, and highlights that *Discipline and Punish* (which he was writing at the time) was but one component of a larger study of the history and theory of punishment he pursued. This chapter may encourage criminologists to begin to treat *Discipline and Punish* more explicitly as such. In Chapter 7, Valverde explores two sets of lectures delivered by Foucault in the 1970s and early 1980s, one of which has been

published as *Truth and Juridical Forms*, and the other as *Wrong-Doing, Truth-Telling: The Function of Avowal in Justice*. Both explore the history of truth—and specifically techniques for uncovering truth—in the context of law and justice. They focus in particular on the practice of avowal, wherein truth is tied to the subjectivity of the offender. Returning again to the analysis of practices in Foucault's work, Valverde considers how such practices have been exported and become inextricably entangled in the formation of subjectivity and the construction of knowledge beyond the criminal/legal context. As issues of responsibility and subjectivity in criminal law remain central concerns of criminology and socio-legal studies, Valverde's discussion of these texts offers a useful introduction for those seeking to expand research in this area. The book concludes with some final reflections and possible future directions for research.

That Valverde is an expert guide to Foucault's work and its application is unquestionable. Her command of the field and its many facets is apparent. Moreover, she simultaneously (and very adroitly) avoids burdening the discussions of Foucault's work with detail, while also ensuring not to oversimplify. This makes understanding Foucault's work, particularly in an introductory text which covers much ground like this one, significantly easier. Valverde's coverage of several recently published lecture series and other more obscure or overlooked texts also expands considerably the ways that Foucault's work may be taken up by others. It not only offers signposts for deepening existing Foucaultian scholarship in criminology and criminal justice but also opens up new possible directions.

However, a new scholar seeking to develop a research project on any of these topics using Foucault's work is likely to find the lack of a solid conclusion in many of the chapters, as well as limited detail in some of the examples, to be significant hurdles in pursuing such research without extra assistance. While the book provides enough information for an interested reader to pursue any query within Foucault's work itself, another introductory text is probably necessary in order to most fully navigate—and apply—Foucault's thought, particularly when it comes to ideas such as discourse, truth, power and subjectivity.

This is most apparent in the final chapter where Valverde proposes future research directions. In line with the framework she establishes at the outset, Valverde wants to see criminological research that '... does not take acts, individuals, identities or institutions for granted, and that does not assume that criminal law and criminal justice are self-contained domains whose history can be understood internally' (p. 175). She wants us to ask: Why does the criminal law focus on willed acts? Why does it bring the individual into the picture when establishing official truth, and consider them guilty when they do not confess or defend themselves (pp. 168-169)? Why do we focus on the individual's character, and consider some offenders as uniquely dangerous or deviant, despite the fact that 'normal' and 'deviant' are products of power (p. 171)? And why do we continue to focus in large part on criminal justice institutions, when decentring those institutions and looking at practices more broadly allows us to see similar processes of regulation elsewhere (p. 173)? This would potentially widen the range of research objects that might be counted as criminological. However, the two possible directions Valverde offers here are not developed to any significant extent. One of Valverde's proposals is that we could turn to Indigenous philosophies on law and justice for guidance (without being more specific on what she means by Indigenous), given the focus on relationships, duties and consequences within these philosophies. The other proposal is that more could be done to follow the example of environmental criminology, which, given the nature of the issues that it deals with, must dispense with traditional criminal law and think across a broader range of practices and institutions. However, neither suggestion is developed beyond a paragraph or problematised more thoroughly using Foucault's tools. Unfortunately, this gives the impression that these examples have simply been added to the end of the book. They could have been developed in more interesting ways either in the conclusion, or throughout the rest of the text.

These concerns are also apparent in the examples used to illustrate the discussions throughout. While the examples themselves are not problematic, they could have benefited from further development. For instance, Valverde suggests that biopolitical power can be illustrated using the 'Black Lives Matter' movement but provides little more than a sentence supporting this assertion, and neglects to explain fully why a criminologist might find biopolitics a useful analytical tool here. Similarly, Valverde's use of international and humanitarian policing, recent austerity measures and economic policies in Greece, and the Iraq war to illustrate aspects of governmentality could have benefited from the same development, particularly because these are not 'traditional' criminal justice examples or contexts.

Despite these issues, Valverde has succeeded in drawing together an incredible amount of scholarship and has effortlessly synthesised this to produce an accessible and engaging book. Not only will students and researchers of criminology and socio-legal studies find something useful in this text but those who are already familiar with Foucault's work are also bound to gain new insights into the relevance of his work for understanding practices of criminal justice.

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