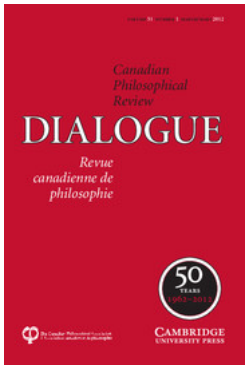
Dialogue
http://journals.cambridge.org/DIA

Additional services for ***Dialogue:***

Email alerts: Click here
Subscriptions: Click here
Commercial reprints: Click here
Terms of use : Click here



Archives and the Event of God: The Impact of Michel Foucault on Philosophical Theology David Galston Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2011, 166 pp., $ 75.00 cloth

Mehmet Karabela

Dialogue / Volume 51 / Issue 01 / March 2012, pp 173 - 176
DOI: 10.1017/S0012217312000339, Published online:

Link to this article: http://journals.cambridge.org/abstract_S0012217312000339

How to cite this article:
Mehmet Karabela (2012). Review of David Galston 'Archives and the Event of God: The Impact of Michel Foucault on Philosophical Theology' Dialogue, 51, pp 173-176 doi:10.1017/S0012217312000339

Request Permissions : Click here

CAMBRIDGE JOURNALS

Downloaded from http://journals.cambridge.org/DIA, IP address: 132.206.27.25 on 28 Sep 2012

world." (85) The question of competence has been settled even before being raised: the state has the authority to decide on the meaning of political existence. Or rather, is it the case that this question has not been settled at all, only displaced and deferred, since it is still unclear precisely who is granted the right to interpret and, by extension, to decide *in the name of the state*? Whose will trumps all other wills? Which collective or individual subject is granted the exclusive right to construct the world through acts of legal or political perception (79) at the expense of other possible world-constructions?

When Kahn shifts the emphasis to the problem of political will, he signals his desire to follow a promising direction for research. Given that, for him, political theology should be "a kind of phenomenology of the political" (21), one would expect a phenomenological analysis of political will, examining its specific constitution, intentionality, or modes of fulfillment. And yet, the rest of the book does not live up to this promise. Throughout, Kahn treats the concept of will in a strictly metaphysical fashion, as though it were a noumenal entity absolutely divorced from reason and allied with freedom, understood as something "uncaused." (62, 90, 92) Such a mystifying approach admits of no phenomenological analysis, which, alternatively, defines the will in terms of consciousness and its intentional matrix, not in terms of free, "uncaused" acts. The heyday of political metaphysics, Kahn's *Political Theology* veers toward the noumenal and the inexplicable in its depiction of sovereign subjectivity: "What the subject brings to the decision is beyond words—it is "nothing"—from the juridical point of view." (83) Although Schmitt, too, finds in the sovereign decision the political analog of the theological *creatio ex nihilo*, to assert that it is "beyond words"—a sort of ineffable presence—is to consign it to the very "thoughtlessness," to which Kahn objects in the conclusion of his book. (157)

MICHAEL MARDER *IKERBASQUE Research Professor of Philosophy*
The University of the Basque Country
Vitoria-Gasteiz

Archives and the Event of God: The Impact of Michel Foucault on Philosophical Theology

DAVID GALSTON

Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2011, 166 pp., $ 75.00 cloth
doi:10.1017/S0012217312000339

The field of philosophical theology has attracted much interest in the past fifteen years, and central European philosophers such as Giorgio Agamben, Alain Badiou and Slovaj Žižek have turned their attention towards religion. Philosophers seem to consider the topic too consequential to be left to theologians and religious thinkers alone, especially in the wake of the highly debated "return of religion." The positions of contemporary and early modern philosophers on theology therefore, have become a popular subject in the publishing world. The past five years have seen a proliferation of books with titles such as "Hegel and Theology," "Kierkegaard and Theology," "Žižek and Theology," and the Continuum series "Philosophy and Theology" provide a good examples of this trend.

Inevitably, this branch of thought has been heavily influenced by Michel Foucault, one of the most significant philosophers of the twentieth century. Although Foucault's

methodologies have informed many branches of the social sciences, his impact on theology has not been thoroughly examined since around the time of his death in 1984. It is true that Sharon Welch first utilised Foucault's analyses of "power-knowledge" to construct a feminist theology of liberation, while Talal Asad developed these analyses by applying Foucault's concept of genealogy to the broader study of religion. Foucault's influence on the practice of religion and spirituality was also the focus of a collection of essays edited by Jeremy Carette and James W. Bernauer, while Jonathan Tran has recently dealt with different aspects of Foucault's views on theology, in particular Christian existence and an appraisal of capitalist societies, using Foucault's conceptions of power and resistance.

Within this context, David Galston's *Archives and the Event of God* distinguishes itself by concentrating on a single concept: the "archive." Galston attempts to apply Foucault's concept of archive to theology and it is this attempt which makes the book so innovative and unique in terms of its approach to religion. *Archives and the Event of God* is the culmination of years of research, started during Galston's Ph.D. studies in the 1990s at McGill University's Faculty of Religious Studies and further developed during the last decade.

Galston classifies his book as a philosophical work, or more precisely, as a work in the field of philosophical hermeneutics (ix) in which he fleshes out three fundamental issues that open up the dialogue between religious studies and Foucault's legacy: (a) human interpretation as an event; (b) the concept of God as an archive event and (c) the implications of archiving for theological thought. Galston's main concern is how God is created as a social reality (not as a reality in itself) and how truth is produced in human experience through statements. To this end, Galston draws particularly on insights from Foucault's two major works, published in the later period of his career, *The Archaeology of Knowledge* and *Discipline and Punish*. While Galston's examples relate to Christian theology, his analysis is also relevant to other religious traditions.

Beginning with the subtitle of the book, *The Impact of Michel Foucault on Philosophical Theology*, Galston opens by trying to define what philosophical theology is and whether it can be likened more closely to theology or to philosophy. Some disciplines, such as the philosophy of religion or theology proper, have clearly defined boundaries, but this is not the case with philosophical theology. In terms of the philosophy/theology distinction, Galston seems to view philosophical theology as theology with philosophical characteristics. Since his distinction is not clear-cut, readers should not expect a sharp differentiation between philosophy of religion and philosophical theology in this work. However, for Galston, there are two methods of *doing* philosophy of religion: the positivistic method (the analytic tradition) and hermeneutics (the continental tradition). Accordingly, he categorizes his work as part of "the tradition of continental philosophy," which he thinks "is not always given a welcoming embrace in North America". (p. 14) In this section, he mentions the works of three scholars who influenced his approach to religion and philosophical theology: James W. Bernauer's *Michel Foucault's Force of Flight*, Marc P. Lalonde's "Power/Knowledge and Liberation," and Thomas R. Flynn's essays on theology. (pp. 13-4)

The book consists of eleven chapters, but basically it can be divided into two parts. The first (chapters one to seven) is concerned with the articulation of concepts such as archaeology, genealogy, Foucault's archive, the meaning of the statements and space existing in the archive. In the second part of the book (chapters eight to eleven), Galston's most novel work appears, as he applies the concept of "archive" to theology.

Throughout the book, the five concepts of archaeology, genealogy, archive, statement and event (frequently used by Foucault) take on central importance.

In elaborating his idea, Galston first explains the notion of an archive according to Foucault. This word signifies an epoch in history, in which the archive becomes a limiting space that permits or denies entry; like an immigration officer on the border, it decides what to include and to exclude from the (native) land of thinking and sense. Since thinking and sense (or non-sense) are related to knowledge and epistemology, they were both key in Foucault's attempt to decipher the relationship between knowledge and power, especially in terms of how power serves as a force to determine the limits of what we know and perceive to be true (or the truth).

Archaeology on the other hand allows Foucault to examine the forms of truth, whereas genealogy helps him to seek out the locations where these forms emerge in the archive. Archaeology investigates how statements are formed through linguistic practices, and genealogy explores how such formations produce the space of credible events through power. The archive, therefore, is not the passive description of what has happened but the dynamic production of meaning as an event. According to this explanation, Sigmund Freud, for example, is not an author to Foucault but an *epistemic event*. (p. 30) This means that although it was Freud who established a new discursive practice, nevertheless, that practice was part of an entire set of related and competing discursive events in the archive of a society.

After introducing Foucault's concept of statement and space in the archive, Galston focuses on genealogy, archive spaces, and the Deleuzian concepts of the *visible* (seen) and the *articulable* (said). He then moves on to Foucault's famous Panopticon, a machine of surveillance from the eighteenth century, which he uses to demonstrate how the concept of "repetition" is important in an archive to justify and normalize an epistemic regime of truth. It is apparent that the first part of the book is a prelude to what Galston aims to accomplish in the second part, and consequently, the first half will mainly be useful for readers who are not familiar with Foucault's work.

Starting with chapter eight, "The Archive and Theology," Galston shows his originality by applying Foucault's concept of archive to theology. He re-imagines the concept of God "in the archivist way". (p. 95) Although "the archivist question is apologetic" he says, it is more an inquiry into the concept of God as a product of the archive's statements as well as an event in the archive in relation to power. (p. 96) This activity of power can be fully understood within the context of a credible product designated to a local setting, and therefore, (socially meaningful) credibility is the primary project in the archive. Galston suggests that there are two possibilities in an archivist approach to theology: (a) the redefinition of systematic theology as the history of systems of God, which Galston calls "archaeological theology," and (b) the interpretation of theology as the critical activity of the present, which he labels "genealogical theology." He proposes to include these two possibilities under the umbrella term, "archival theology". (p. 111)

Galston delves into the notion of archaeological theology in chapter nine, maintaining that archaeology is concerned with the history of the production of God by exposing the epistemic layers of the theological archive, i.e., the power/knowledge relationship in which the idea of God is produced. (p. 112) Accordingly, for Galston, "the God concept is comprehended as a side effect of the linguistic event". (p. 113) His interpretation in this chapter is influenced by Foucault's poststructuralist idea of language, which holds that language creates rather than identifies a hermeneutical structure. In the next chapter, Galston presents genealogical theology as the practice of critical presence in

the archive, before turning to the future of philosophical theology in the final chapter where he leaves readers with two questions to consider. One concerns the archaeology, i.e., exposing the historical circumstances that create the fiction of truth claims, which Galston calls "displaying the archive." The second question concerns the genealogical practice of theology in an archive, which he calls "dwelling in the archive". (p. 134)

In my opinion, Galston's work suggests the broader implications of Foucault's work for theology and religious studies: that religion (and its history) should be analyzed as a formation of discursive practices, especially with regard to how religion's rule-ordered practices operate and how they produce the social effects of truth. However, it also asserts that the notion of truth/knowledge is internally related to the notion of power and that, therefore, religious belief and practices cannot be separated from the issue of power.

In providing a new framework for the future of philosophical theology, Galston has distinguished himself among those who write on Foucault and theology by focusing on the philosophical implications of the *archive* for theological thinking. *Archives and the Event of God* is then an invitation to a type of archaeological examination intending to disclose the archive of meaning that theology comprises. Galston's work, as a re-statement of theology, has great potential to generate theoretical as well as practical discussion in the study of religion and, thus, deserves to be on the reading list for advanced seminar classes not only in the history of philosophical theology or religious history, but also in the history of ideas.

MEHMET KARABELA *Queen's University*

Greek Tragedy and Political Philosophy: Rationalism and Religion in Sophocles' Theban Plays

PETER AHRENSDORF
Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2009 (cloth), 2011 (paper), x + 192 pp,
$ 23.00 (paper), $84.00 (cloth)
doi:10.1017/S0012217312000340

Plato banned tragedy from his ideal cities, while Aristotle gave it a pedagogical role. Nietzsche argued that the rationalism embodied in the figure of Socrates destroyed tragedy, and Hegel thought that Greek tragedy remains an important exploration of the historical and political dimension of human life. Goldhill (2000), in a chapter of *The Cambridge History of Greek and Roman Political Thought*, argues that this "long and not yet finished tradition of contest between philosophy and tragedy […] is nothing less than the question of the boundaries and limits of political theory" (p. 61)

Tragedies and comedies were a central part of the festival of the Great Dionysia, the largest public gathering of the year, and this was a political occasion. Special seats were reserved for the members of the *Boulē*, priests, foreign ambassadors, ephebes, foreigners, metics. Various ceremonials opened the Great Dionysia and they glorified the polis and their leading citizens. The playwrights were chosen by the Eponymous Archon, the productions were funded by the polis, a special fund, called the Theoric fund, paid citizens to attend the theatre, and the judges of the dramatic competition were chosen by lot so that each tribe was represented. All this