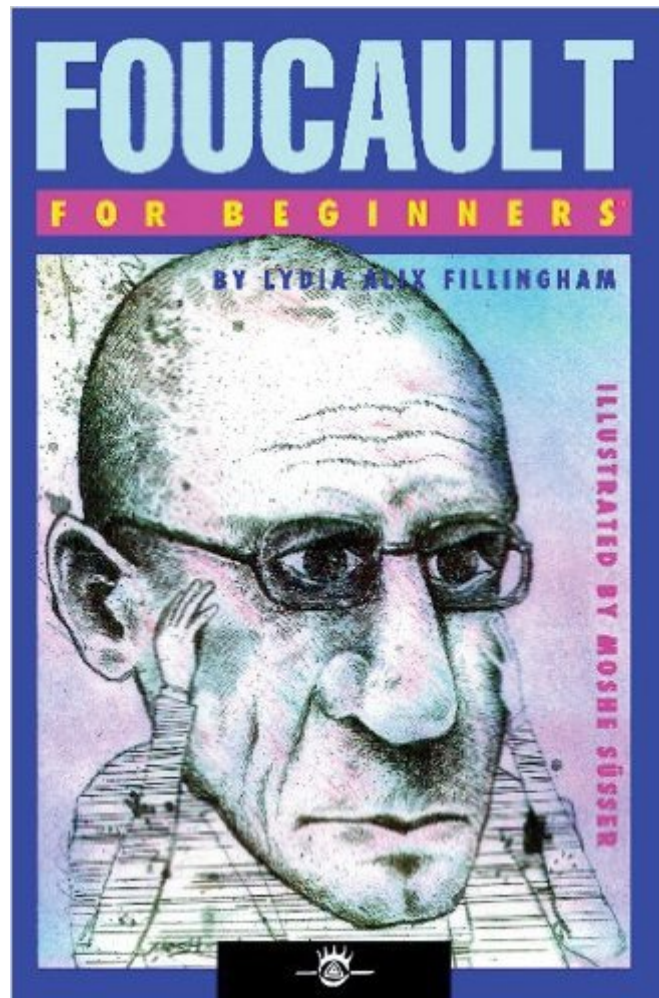


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Foucault For Beginners



Synopsis

Michel Foucault's work has profoundly affected the teaching of such diverse disciplines as literary criticism, criminology, and gender studies. Arguing that definitions of abnormal behavior are culturally constructed, Foucault explored the unfair division between those who meet and those who deviate from social norms. Foucault's deeply visual sense of scenes such as ritual public executions, lends itself well to Moshe Süsser's dramatic illustrations.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

This gentle introduction to Foucault hits on and clarifies most of the high points of his theories and approach; namely, it is an exploration into the unfair divisions between those who meet and those who deviate from social norms. Foucault's main thesis is that: defining what is normal and abnormal are acts of "cultural construction," rather than revelations of deep epistemological truths. They are thus based on "social knowledge and truth" rather than on "abstract knowledge or epistemological truth." As in the case of war or international politics, social knowledge and truths are the result of "social constructions," very much a product of the power to engage in such constructions. Or put more simply, they are a clear case of the adage: "might makes right." Or said differently, they are as much a product of the power that wields them, as of epistemology. Since there are no social absolutes, those who wield the most social power (and can get enough people to believe in their constructions), get to define what is socially abnormal. In relief, normal then becomes the

complementary or default universal category. For instance, since there is no absolute definition of what it means to be "insane." If enough powerful (spelled "authoritative") people decide that someone is "insane," for all intents and purposes, that person IS "insane." What remains, the residual, is considered the normal and the universal. The truth then is that such a definition is more about the ways in which social power is wielded than about the pursuit of knowledge, per se. How do some people get the power to create beliefs about us and then get the rest of us to accept their ideas of who we are? The short answer is that knowledge and power are incestuous allies.

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