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Genealogical Methodology According to Nietzsche

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Abstract

This study aims to introduce Nietzsche's genealogical method as a critical and deconstructive tool for prevailing values, ideas, and customs, and as a philosophical approach that aims at a rigorous critical review of many concepts upon which philosophical discourse is based, such as the concept of value, truth, language, logic, metaphysics, and others. Through our exploration of Nietzsche's genealogical critique of various philosophical issues, we have reached the conclusion that this critique constitutes a project of evaluating values in terms of their origin and legitimacy, and a questioning of Western reason. It is simultaneously a means of searching for and uncovering the primary roots of moral judgments in order to expose and unveil the various distortions associated with them, removing the masks that have concealed the truth. It is an instrument for undermining and destabilizing the various concepts upon which Western philosophical thought has been built. Consequently, its aim is to achieve human knowledge and encompass its various dimensions: social, psychological, religious, and ethical. This is accomplished by dismantling the dominant paradigm and reestablishing a new history for philosophy in general and values in particular.

Keywords: Nietzsche, Genealogy, Truth, Metaphysics, Values.

Introduction

The term "Généalogie" (Genealogy) emerged in the French language in the 13th century AD, derived from the Latin word "Généalogia," which was in turn derived from the Greek word "genealogos." The Greek word consists of two parts: "genea," meaning origin, and "logos," meaning science or study. The verb "genealogein" indicates the mentioning and enumeration of origins (Mustafa, 2009, p. 157).

The compound word "Généalogie" has generally come to refer, in most European languages, to a series of ancestors connected by a relative kinship who necessarily descend from a common origin. It thus denotes the science that focuses on researching the origins and lineages of families. This concept has been present since the era of Greek culture, particularly in its mythical aspect, where genealogy referred to the kinship between gods. The term "théogonie" was commonly used during that time (Mustafa, 2009, p. 157).

Since the 17th century AD, the term began to refer to a branch of historical study that focuses on studying racial and genealogical belonging within a single family or the science of studying lineages. With the onset of the 19th century, the term started to evolve and expand, although it remained closely associated with the field of history. Its scope extended from genealogy of human lineages and families to encompass the study of the evolution of animals, institutions, and ideas. The concept gained a new and more precise meaning with the contribution of Charles Darwin (1809-1882) and his theory of species origin and evolution (Mustafa, 2009, p. 158).

In philosophy, the genealogical method took on a new dimension in the hands of the German

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philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900). He utilized it as a philosophical approach aimed at questioning concepts, values, and their fundamental core. More precisely, it became a method for critical philosophy, seeking to reassess all prevailing values in Western culture.

Concept of Genealogy for Nietzsche

Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900) employed genealogy as a philosophical method aimed at questioning concepts, values, and their fundamental core. More precisely, it served as a critical philosophical approach that sought to reassess all prevailing values in Western culture.

Genealogy intersects with etymology, which concerns itself with the derivational research of concepts. However, genealogy does not stop at this point. It is not merely a return of concepts to their originating sources. It fundamentally stands against the concept of origin in its metaphysical sense because the concept presented by metaphysics is an ideal, elusive, fixed, and complete beginning. Instead, genealogy is a return for the sake of the heart, as the genealogist seeks to trace the primal roots of concepts, uncovering their formation and crystallization in order to transform and purify them from all metaphysical impurities.

Thus, genealogy, in Nietzsche's perspective, becomes a strategy against the evolutionary constructive concept of history. The philosophical thinking initiated by the genealogical question aims to be a recollection of the history of philosophy, rather than a mere retrieval. It seeks to establish a new history of philosophy on the margins of the history woven by metaphysics itself. This endeavor aims to elevate the trinity of nihilism, which consists of resentment, the wretched consciousness, and the ascetic ideal. These are successive fundamental moments in the history of the West (Andalusi, 2006, p. 21).

Genealogical reading is a critical reading resulting from the discovery of certain shortcomings in the analysis of previous philosophical thought issues. Nietzsche applied it to several concepts such as metaphysics, the self, the body, truth, and morality. He overturned the accepted moral system, which had been established since Plato's time until his era. He considered religious, metaphysical, and even modern values and ideals to be evil in themselves because they disregard reality, life, and existence in favor of imaginary values and ideals.

Genealogical Critique for Nietzsche

Genealogy of Metaphysics

The precise meaning of genealogy in Nietzsche's metaphysics does not involve investigating its origins or providing a historical account of its concept in order to determine its essence. It also does not entail following a historical trajectory of its various forms or reaching a definitive endpoint. Such an approach would fall into the trap of glorifying metaphysics, its beginnings, truths, and fixed essences. Rather, it is an "attempt to reconstruct different active systems. It is an interpretation of the history of metaphysics and a subversion of metaphysical history. However, it is not a search for a primary meaning; rather, it is a demonstration of the priorities and precedences given to one meaning over another. It is an examination of the differences and divergences that generate meanings" (Atiya Ahmad, 2010, p. 331). This precise meaning of genealogy in metaphysics is expressed by Foucault when he states, "If genealogy is concerned with listening to history instead of believing in metaphysics, what can it gain? Is there something other than things behind them? Certainly, it does not concern the secrets of fundamental things that have no history. Rather, it concerns the secret that is different from their essence or the gradually formed essence that became part by part, beginning with forms that were strange to it. What we find from the historical beginning of things is not the preserved identity of their origin, but rather

imbalance and dispersion" (Foucault, 1988, p. 64). According to Foucault, the conflict between genealogy and history is not a conflict between the lofty, transcendent view of the philosopher and the narrow, limited view of the world, but rather a conflict with the historical metaphysical presentation of ideal meanings and indeterminate universals. It is a conflict with the search for the origin (origine) (Foucault, 1988, p. 64).

Among the efforts of genealogy is the historicization of truth, not truth in the metaphysical sense, but truth as a tool that allows philosophy to engage with history. This occurs only when philosophy abandons its metaphysical garb founded on binary concepts, and history becomes concerned with what actually happens at all its different levels. This is precisely the task entrusted to genealogy.

According to Foucault, genealogical history teaches us to undermine the reverence accorded to origins. The ultimate origin is a surplus within metaphysical growth, based on the assumption that things, at their beginnings, possessed something exceedingly precious and essential. We tend to believe that things were initially perfect (Foucault, 1988, p. 66).

Nietzsche considered the term "metaphysics" in all its significance and position within philosophies to be built upon fragile, deceptive, and unreasonable foundations, a fallacy imposed on human minds. In this regard, he states, "To throw an arrow, it is necessary to have a hand behind it—a force that is unreasonable. But when the sources suddenly dry up, the first thing the mind considers is demons and their cunning. These fragile foundations have migrated to higher levels and advanced degrees, starting from religious and mythical divergence, and then manifested in the phenomenon of dreams" (Nietzsche, *Human, All Too Human*, p. 77).

Metaphysics, therefore, inherits from religion and is accompanied by and supportive of its ethical consequences, as it leads to the creation of another independent world detached from our earthly world, adorned with the noblest ethical form. It symbolizes goodness, truth, and perfection. The ethical character that metaphysics confers upon existence aims, behind it, to detach humans from their earthly world and connect them to the other world in a more convincing manner than religion (Zakaria, 1966, p. 69). Consequently, according to Nietzsche, the nihilism that governs religious thought also prevailed in philosophical thinking. Philosophy was always directed by the priestly model and influenced by it, revolving within the orbit of religion. Therefore, philosophers did not detach themselves from the ascetic ideal that seeks a separate world. Despite the fading of religious vision and the death of God, its traces have not yet disappeared from philosophy. Philosophers still allow their personal religious sentiments to deeply affect the intellectual fabric of their methodologies (Nietzsche, *Human, All Too Human*, p. 75).

It is worth noting that Nietzsche does not consider metaphysics from an ontological perspective but rather from an ethical standpoint. He does not examine ontological conceptions but views them merely as symptoms indicating life's tendencies. He does not approach the problem of existence in the way it has been traditionally investigated for centuries; rather, he comprehends the problem of existence as a problem of values (Atiya Ahmed, 2010, p. 293). According to Nietzsche, all philosophies, without their proponents' awareness, ultimately trace existential problems back to value problems. In every philosophy, there is a preconceived moral judgment, and even metaphysics, its ethical decision is the human's escape from the real world to an elusive otherworldly realm, similar to the world presented by Plato. Hence, Nietzsche sees the decisive distinction between his philosophy and the philosophies of Plato or Leibniz as the lack of belief in eternal concepts, eternal values, and eternal images. Terms such as existence, essence, absolute, selfhood, and thing-in-itself are merely frameworks invented by thought, freezing the state of flux (Nietzsche, 1991, p. 191). According to Nietzsche, these philosophers lacked historical sensibility and failed to understand that humans are the result of a process of becoming, and the realm of knowledge as well. There are no eternal given truths beyond the absolute facts. However,

Nietzsche adds, "Thanks to the history of language and word derivation, it has become apparent that most words are in the process of formation, and we have learned to look at words in their becoming" (Nietzsche, 1991, p. 191).

Here, Genealogy stands in opposition to metaphysics, particularly in terms of its rejection of stability, unity, and harmony, which metaphysics claims. The logic of metaphysics employs a system that asserts spontaneity and certainty, using concepts such as identity, essence, self, cause, correspondence, judgments, and truthfulness, among others. It is a discourse based on the centrality of the self, transparency of consciousness, and representation (Andalusi, 2006, p. 38). Genealogy, on the other hand, encapsulates all the errors left behind by the history of human reason, as it is a science that investigates the fundamental errors of humanity, as if these errors were the ultimate human truths.

Critique of Logic

Nietzsche considered that logic played a significant role in establishing many concepts that nourished metaphysics, such as the concept of identity, self, essence, truth, spontaneity, causality, correspondence, and truthfulness, among others. Therefore, his genealogical hammer targeted it.

Nietzsche wondered and answered: "From where did logic arise in people's minds? Undoubtedly, from the irrationality that originally had a vast domain" (Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, 1993, p. 125). In his view, the origin of logic is not the desire for pure knowledge or attaining certainty, but rather it is connected to an irrational origin, namely, the vital benefit, i.e., the search for what benefits life. He states, "...statements, like all our concepts, are tools and means in the service of a need. But they are by no means a pure cognitive need. Rather, they are a need to recognize things and anticipate them in order to transform them according to our desires" (Nietzsche, *Human, All Too Human*, p. 29).

And this vital origin of logic also applies to its principles imbued with the metaphysical tint, such as the principle of identity and its derivatives like essence and self. For Nietzsche, the principle of identity is nothing but the attribution of the quality of symmetry to what is originally asymmetrical. This principle is a means manufactured by the mind to control flux, as is the case with the idea of essence, which dedicates itself to stability at the expense of flux, giving rise to the concept of a thing-in-itself and the concept of self. Nietzsche vehemently criticized this concept, turning his heart against Descartes' cogito statement (Andalusi, 2006, p. 34).

In addition to the concepts of identity and self, Nietzsche focused on the concept of causality, which is considered one of the fundamental pillars of formal logic and a crucial support for metaphysical thinking. It oscillates between religious and moral thought, on the one hand, and traces its roots back to primitive thinking and the mythical ideas and interpretations it weaves, such as evil spirits and human sin, among others (Andalusi, 2006, p. 37). In his view, this concept originates from human fear of any new phenomena. The higher interpretation of phenomena means connecting a specific phenomenon to a clear cause, which imparts a sense of comfort, security, and power. Nietzsche states, "To bring something out of the unknown and into the known is something that reassures, makes one feel at ease, and even provides a sense of power. With the unknown, danger, anxiety, and illusion emerge—the first natural instinct is to distance oneself from these dreary states" (Nietzsche, *The Twilight of the Idols*, 1996, p. 50). However, Nietzsche believes that successive events do not allow for the deduction of a necessary relationship between cause and effect. Causality is merely a false idea fabricated by the mind and imposed upon things.

Critique of Reason

Nietzsche considered reason to be the true foundation upon which metaphysics was built, and he saw it as the source of human illusions, falsehoods, and errors. It was the philosophers of metaphysics who

believed in immutable truths, placing their faith in reason's ability to attain them. They considered reason to be the ideal tool for understanding existence and the world, and the generator of truth. They turned its principles into laws of existence, as Nietzsche states: "In the event that we succeed in getting rid of the metaphysical foundation upon which it is based, that foundation which has permeated our language and grammatical expressions, becoming a necessity, it seems as though we would cease to think if we abandoned this metaphysics. Philosophers find great difficulty in liberating themselves from the belief that the truths of metaphysics are essential, and thus they believe in reason as part of the metaphysical world itself" (Nietzsche, 1991, p. 65).

According to Nietzsche, the history of human reason is a history of errors and fallacies resulting from its misuse, whether intentionally or unintentionally. Reason has often fallen victim to domination and manipulation by religious leaders and proponents of metaphysics. It has been used "unilaterally or ideologically to justify positions, opinions, or defenses of religious or philosophical traditions and legacies" (Harb, 1998, p. 254), thereby becoming a source of all fallacies and illusory ideas. Throughout history, reason, according to Nietzsche, has made four major errors, which he explains in his book "The Twilight of the Idols." These errors are: the failure to distinguish between cause and effect—the error of false or unjustified causality, the error of illusory motives, and the error of free will (Nietzsche, *The Twilight of the Idols*, 1996, pp. 44-56).

Nietzsche believed that dismantling metaphysics first requires eliminating its foundation. This does not mean the elimination of reason itself, but rather the elimination of the illusions woven around it, such as considering it a foundation for truth production, a source of knowledge, a discourse on being, and a center for the self and the presence of meaning or its certainty, judgments, and stable facts... and so on. He states, "Those who seek knowledge should not get entangled in what the mind desires from operations" (Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, 1938, p. 112).

The genealogical critique of reason aims to remove the mask from those claims and expose the illusions regarding its rationality, mechanisms of concealment, repression, exclusion, leading to the necessity of dismantling reason to restate its problematic nature, determine its scope and conditions of use, and shape its concepts. It also involves reordering its relationship with its others, foremost among them its relationship with the non-rational or the embodied (Andalusi, 2006, p. 38). According to Nietzsche's perspective, reason is no longer a vessel that contains a set of fixed principles, but a dynamic and renewable force characterized by flux, renewal, flexibility, and an instrumental tool that changes with shifting contexts.

Genealogy and Critique of Values

Nietzsche's entire philosophy can be seen as an attempt to evaluate or overturn values by confronting nihilism, which he sought to eliminate through genealogy. Nietzsche introduced the concepts of meaning and value into philosophy and aimed to transcend Western metaphysics by transforming it into genealogy, replacing the problem of existence with the problem of value. According to Nietzsche, the foundation of metaphysics and epistemology lies in values, ethics, and a radical critique of metaphysical thought reveals its true nature as mere ethics. He attributes value to life, considering life and its continuity as valuable.

Nietzsche's critical stance on the question of values and his overturning of them can be understood by examining his works. In "The Birth of Tragedy," he establishes value on life, drawing from Greek tragedy as an epic challenge of death for the sake of life. In his book "The Dawn," Nietzsche indicates the beginning of his campaign against morality, starting with the Indian saying, "There are many dawns that have not yet shone," portraying a person searching for this dawn amidst the darkness represented by prevailing moral values to overturn and dismantle them. He undermines the trust in their foundations, such as virtues, self-will, free will, contempt for the body, and all Christian moral values, including what is known as the ethics of self-deception (Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, pp. 106-108). His book

"Thus Spoke Zarathustra" serves as a defense of life and the body against the self and traditional morality, as well as metaphysics. Zarathustra is chosen as the destroyer of old morals, introducing entirely new and different values (Atiya Ahmed, 2010, p. 295).

In addition, his book "The Gay Science," whose title alludes to the demise of all old truths, is a decisive stage in his methodology regarding the transformation of values. Nietzsche states, "Immediately after completing this work, without delay, I embarked on the monumental task of transvaluing values, possessed by an unparalleled sense of audacity" (Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, p. 138). In the introduction to his book "On the Genealogy of Morals," Nietzsche formulates the problematics of genealogy in the following questions: What origin is truly the origin of good and evil within us? The formulation of Nietzsche's question changed under the influence of his historical and philological background, transforming into a genealogical formulation: "Under what conditions did humanity invent these judgments of value from good and evil? And what value do they have in themselves? Do they signify poverty or impoverishment, decadence of life, or do they indicate abundance, strength, and the will to life with its courage, optimism, and future?" (Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals*, 2006, p. 34). Thus, genealogy places the value of values in question.

Nietzsche considers the critique of morality as the foundation of his intellectual activity, and the concept of morality for him takes on multiple connotations and is used in various contexts. It serves as metaphysics, language, interpretation of existence, and an evaluation of phenomena and things. Therefore, he states, "The moral judgment should never be taken literally: in itself, it only signifies the senseless. But as a science of symptoms, it remains a valuable tool that reveals to the knowledgeable at least... Morality is nothing but a symbolic language, a study of symptoms. We must first understand what it concerns in order to benefit from it" (Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, p. 57-58).

With that in mind, the purpose of the genealogical critique of morality is to raise bold questions about the origin of moral judgments and the motivations associated with them, such as knowledge and the will to power, in order to reconsider their contents and essence. It is not primarily concerned with the historical derivation and etymology of the word as required by a literal application of the concept of genealogy. Nietzsche himself clarifies this when he states that it involves contemplations on the origin of preconceived moral judgments.

In his critique of these values, Nietzsche states, "We are in need of a critique of moral values. We must place the value of these values in question, and here we lack knowledge of the conditions and circumstances of their emergence and development" (Nietzsche, *Genealogy of Morals*, 2006, p. 14). From this perspective, the process of accomplishing an evaluation of the projected values is the fundamental task of genealogical critique. This necessitates a radical transformation in the formulation of the question in Western thought and culture, which can be summarized in two fundamental formulations: the ontological formulation, which seeks the essence, meaning, and truth of a thing, rooted in Greek philosophy with Socrates and Plato, and the transcendental formulation with Kant. However, the genealogical question is a question that pertains to the one who speaks, questioning the will to power behind speech, inquiring about the nature of the forces that seize discourse and the nature of the will that appropriates and possesses the text. Who speaks differently behind the discourse? Nietzsche states, "The meaning of something is the relationship of that thing to the force that seizes it, and the value of something is the hierarchy of forces that find expression in the thing as a complex phenomenon" (Andalusi, 2006, p. 97-98).

The proclaimed goal that Nietzsche adopts as a justification for this critique is the desperate desire to uproot the metaphysical roots of morality from modern Western thought and individual selfhood, considering them as a cause of decadence.

Conclusion

Nietzsche has been remarkably bold in his genealogical approach to the question of values, attempting to strip them of their sanctity and absoluteness, which they have possessed for a long time. Instead, he ascribes relativity to them, thus opening up the space for reevaluation and change, as long as they bear a relative character and originate from human beings themselves. This new perspective on values opens the way to a fresh understanding of the world, free from theological conceptions, and to a reevaluation of human identity, which metaphysics has characterized with a single and static essence, thereby stifling all creativity.

If Descartes' *cogito* precedes existence in his philosophy, Nietzsche's establishment of the genealogical critique makes existence primordial, meaning that humans exist first and then determine their essence through their will.

Genealogy is one of Nietzsche's great innovations in the field of philosophy, crystallizing the concept of reading as mechanisms and procedures for deconstructing texts and interpreting them at a time when discourse analysis sciences had not yet emerged. Thus, he paved the way for the development of various reading methodologies such as the archaeological method, hermeneutics, discourse analysis, and deconstruction.

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