GENEALOGICAL CRITIQUE OF SOCIAL PRACTICES: NIETZSCHE AND FOUCAULT VERSUS HABERMAS

Arūnas Mickevičius

© Arūnas Mickevičius
Assoc. Professor, Vilnius University, Faculty of Philosophy, Institute of Philosophy, Department of Philosophy of Science, Social and Political Philosophy
Universiteto St. 9/1, LT-01513 Vilnius
E-mail: arunas.mickevicius@fsf.vu.lt
ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0222-1590

Abstract: This article aims to elucidate Michel Foucault's interpretive engagement with key concepts in Friedrich Nietzsche's philosophy, to demonstrate their significance for the development of Foucault's genealogical method, and to examine how, particularly in his polemic with Jürgen Habermas, genealogy becomes a question of the legitimacy of critique — namely, how critical interrogation of social practices remains possible. The central thesis is that Foucault's genealogy, shaped through a selective appropriation of Nietzschean insights and positioned as an alternative to Habermas's theory of communicative action, should not be understood as a search for universally valid normative structures. Rather, it constitutes a historically grounded framework for understanding subjectivity and social practices, enabling us to think and act differently, and thereby contributing to the ongoing task of freedom. The article argues that Foucault, instrumentally relying on Nietzsche, developed genealogical hermeneutics as an interpretive practice that is oriented towards a critical understanding of social practices permeated by mechanisms of power. A key divergence from Nietzsche lies in Foucault's de-psychologization of agency: whereas Nietzsche often grounds knowledge and morality in the subjective tactics of individuals, Foucault treats psychological motivation as an effect of impersonal power strategies without strategists.

The article further contends that the core disagreement between Foucault and Habermas concerns the relation between power, truth, and subjectivity. Foucault reverses the traditional dependency: rather than power being conditioned by truth and the subject, it is truth and the subject that are constituted through power. He critiques Habermas's model of ideal communication as ahistorical and utopian, arguing that no discourse is free from power. Consequently, critique should not aim to abolish power, but to engage it through legal norms, techniques of governance, and an ethos that minimizes domination.

Keywords: hermeneutics, critical theory, social criticism, interpretation, genealogy, will to power.

Methodological Approach

The aim of the paper is to explicate Michel Foucault's interpretive engagement with Friedrich Nietzsche's fundamental concepts; second, to demonstrate Nietzsche's significance for the development of Foucault's genealogy; and third, to reveal how Foucault's genealogical research, in polemics with Jürgen Habermas, addresses the problem of legitimizing the question: How is a genealogical critique of various social practices possible? The article aims to substantiate the thesis that Foucault's genealogical approach, as an alternative to Habermas's theory, offers a meaningful and measured framework that enables us to understand who we are today, challenges us to think differently than before, and urges us not to repeat past actions; in this way, Foucault's genealogical exploration of social practices fuels the ongoing work of our freedom.

Foucault, in his various works and interviews, has repeatedly emphasized the importance of Nietzsche's chosen philosophical strategies and ideas for his own theoretical research. Beyond occasional references and interview statements, two of Foucault's texts — "Nietzsche, Freud, Marx"[1] and "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History"[2] — stand out as key works dedicated specifically to Nietzsche's reception. In an interview given on 29 May 1984, Foucault assured that he had begun to become interested with Nietzsche's texts as early as 1952–1953 (Foucault 1994: 703). Foucault's numerous references to Nietzsche should be

---

1   The article first appeared in print in *Cahiers de Royaumont* (Paris: Minut, 1967), vol. 4: Nietzsche, pp. 185–200. It was prepared on the basis of a paper read at the Royaumont Colloquium in July 1964.

2   The article first appeared in print in *Hommage a Jean Hyppolite* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1971), pp. 145–172.

understood as a very active *instrumentalist* methodological approach of Foucault himself to the ideas expressed by Nietzsche.

On March 4, 1972, the French intellectuals Foucault and Deleuze discussed the issue of the correlation of theory and practice in a conversation. Foucault emphasized the "local and regional", i.e. non-totalizing theoretical approach to practice, which was important to him (Foucault & Deleuze 1977: 208). The latter implies that today the role of the intellectual is no longer to position themselves somewhat ahead and aside, expressing the suppressed truth of the collective. Rather, it is to struggle against the forms of power that transform the intellectual into an object and instrument within the realms of "knowledge", "truth", "consciousness", and "discourse" (Ibid.: 208). The task of this struggle, according to Foucault, is to highlight the mechanisms and strategies of the functioning of power, to unmask power where it is invisible and insidious. In this respect, "a theory is the regional system of this struggle" (Ibid.: 208).

Deleuze, broadly agreeing with Foucault and extending his line of thought, stated that: "a theory is something like a box of tools" (Ibid.: 208). Theory, like tools, must serve a practical function — it must act and work. If there are no people actively using tools and theory in various practices, then either the value of such theory is zero, or its time has not yet come. In specifying theory's instrumental function, Deleuze further recalls the words of Proust: "treat my book as a pair of glasses directed to the outside; if they don't suit you, find another pair; I leave it to you to find your own instrument, which is necessarily an instrument for combat. A theory does not totalize; it is an instrument for multiplication and it also multiplies itself" (Ibid.: 208). It is this metaphor of theory as a toolbox, mentioned by Deleuze, that aptly catches how Foucault's methodological approach to Nietzsche's theoretical insights should be treated.

Towards "Incompleteness of Interpretation"

A colloquium on Nietzsche was held in Royaumont from 4 to 8 July 1964. Foucault and Deleuze were actively involved in its organization, and Foucault presented a paper entitled "Nietzsche, Freud, Marx". In it, he discussed the "techniques of interpretation" of these three thinkers and even expressed the dream "one day to compile a kind of general corpus, an encyclopedia of all the techniques of interpretation that we have come to know from the Greek grammarians to our own day" (Foucault 1998: 269). Foucault emphasized that every culture has its own systems of interpretation, its own techniques, its own methods, its own

ways of suspecting language of often wanting to say something other than what it says, of expressing something other than what it says.

In the 19th century, Marx, Nietzsche and Freud, according to Foucault, opened up a new possibility of interpretation, the essence of which is that they "changed the nature of the sign and modified the fashion in which the sign can in general be interpreted" (Ibid.: 272). The first feature of this new interpretation is that these authors, according to Foucault, changed the distribution of signs themselves in space. For example, in the sixteenth century, signs were homogeneously distributed in space, which itself was uniform in all directions. This meant that earthly signs pointed to the sky, which in turn pointed to the underworld. Signs from a person could point to an animal, which could point to a plant, and vice versa. In contrast, beginning in the nineteenth century with Freud, Marx, and Nietzsche, signs began to be distributed inhomogeneously within a more differentiated and deeper (French: profondeur) space, which came to be understood not as interiority but as exteriority.

According to Foucault, Nietzsche becomes crucial at this point, as he sets out to unmask metaphysical depth. Nietzsche begins to critique the ideal of depth — the depth of consciousness — declaring it an invention of philosophers. This depth was understood as a "pure" and "interior" search for truth; however, Nietzsche revealed that such "depth" only implied resignation, hypocrisy, and a mask. In examining the signs of this so-called "depth," the interpreter must descend vertically and reveal, without concealment, that this "interior depth" is imaginary and does not correspond to what it claims to be. Foucault himself, following Nietzsche, is concerned to show that in fact the interpreter must overcome the downward path only in order to return, to restore that glowing, alluring exteriority that has been hidden and cluttered.

In other words, the interpreter, like an excavator, must dig deeper and deeper, which transforms the work of interpretation into an ascent. The higher one "rises" during interpretation, the better one can see the invisible depth that unfolds beneath. However, this "depth" ultimately appears as a superficial secret — much like the flight of the eagle and Zarathustra's ascent into the mountains, which, according to Foucault, represent an inversion of the notion of depth, i.e. "the discovery that depth was only a game and a surface fold. To the extent that the world becomes deeper under our gaze, we perceive that everything which elicited man's depth was only child's play" (Ibid.: 273).

The second feature of the "new possibility of interpretation" opened by Nietzsche, which complements the first, is what Foucault terms the "incompleteness of interpretation" (French: L'inachevé de

l'interprétation). Interpretation has thus become an infinite task. In Nietzsche's philosophy, Foucault sees an important opportunity for himself: "the farther one goes in interpretation, the closer one comes at the same time to an absolutely dangerous region where interpretation not only will find its point of return but where it will disappear as interpretation, perhaps involving the disappearance of the interpreter himself" (Ibid.: 274). The concept of the "incompleteness of interpretation," as formulated by Foucault — who identifies it with, though does not explicitly cite, Nietzsche's concept of perspectivism — presupposes that there is no primordial interpretable. Accordingly, there is no primordial, universally grounded, or unambiguously correct theoretical model or social practice based on such a model:

> "There is nothing absolutely primary to interpret, for after all everything is already interpretation, each sign is in itself not the thing that offers itself to interpretation but an interpretation of other signs. If you like, an *interpretandum* that is not already *interpretans*, so that it is as much a relationship of violence as of elucidation that is established in interpretation" (Ibid.: 275).

Moreover, Foucault, clearly following Nietzsche, argues that interpretation is not intended to explain or illuminate something, but is established by force. In other words, interpretation does not reveal the interpreted object, which passively surrenders to it. Rather, interpretation can only overthrow an existing interpretation by force — disrupting it, overturning it, smashing it with hammer blows. In Foucault's view, words themselves are interpretations, and he aptly highlights Nietzsche's insight that words are invented by the ruling classes: precisely because words do not correspond directly to the signified, they impose an interpretation. If we ask, in the manner of Gadamer, whether interpretation "entail[s] the discovery of a preexisting meaning" or whether it "is in the service of the will to power" (Gadamer 1989: 24), it becomes clear that Foucault, following Nietzsche, consciously rejects Gadamer's "philosophical hermeneutics" and instead embraces the establishment of meaning through the will to power. Developing a concept of interpretation distinct from Gadamer's — later aptly termed "the hermeneutics of suspicion" by Paul Ricoeur — Foucault stated:

> "Perhaps this primacy of interpretation with respect to signs is what is most decisive in modern hermeneutics. The idea that interpretation precedes the sign implies that the sign is not a simple and benevolent being. <...> Beginning with Freud, Marx, and Nietzsche, it seems to me that the sign becomes malevolent; I mean that there is in the

sign an ambiguous and somewhat suspicious form of ill will and "malice" [French: malveiller]. And this is to the extent that the sign is already an interpretation that does not appear as such. Signs are interpretations that try to justify themselves, and not the reverse" (Foucault 1998: 276–277).

The final feature of this hermeneutic is that interpretation must confront the necessity of interpreting itself ad infinitum, constantly returning to itself. This entails two consequences: first, interpretation must now ask "who" interprets — that is, who is the "subject" of interpretation; second, the temporality of interpretation becomes cyclical, unlike the temporality of signs, which have a definite duration, or the temporality of dialectics, which remains linear. In other words, signs appear and disappear; they are constantly changing and temporary, while interpretations are eternal. According to Foucault, the only real mortal danger today does not stem from "endless interpretation" but from "signs." To believe that the existence of signs presupposes some primordiality, reality, or coherence would spell the death of interpretation. Foucault wrote:

"It seems to me necessary to understand what too many of our contemporaries forget, that hermeneutics and semiology are two fierce enemies. A hermeneutic that in effect falls back on a semiology believes in the absolute existence of signs: it abandons the violence, the incompleteness, the infinity of interpretations in order to enthrone the terror of the index or to suspect language. Here we recognize Marxism after Marx" (Ibid.: 278).

Conversely, when we encounter a hermeneutic that surrenders itself to its own infinite "incompleteness of interpretation," we immediately recognize Nietzsche's influence. Undoubtedly, Foucault's sympathies lie with Nietzsche. Although in his lecture "Nietzsche, Freud, Marx" Foucault sought to adopt a seemingly neutral stance when discussing this Nietzschean "possibility of a new interpretation," his later writings convincingly demonstrate that he instrumentally embraced this concept, transforming it into — if not a full paradigm — then at least a key methodological tool in his research.

For instance, in *Things and Words*, where he distinguishes and analyzes three epistemes — the Renaissance (sixteenth century), the classical (rationalism of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries), and the modern (late eighteenth century to early nineteenth century and onward) — Foucault once again returns to this Nietzschean approach to hermeneutics. Foucault argued: "Let us call the totality of

the learning and skills that enable one to make the signs speak and to discover their meaning, hermeneutics; let us call the totality of the learning and skills that enable one to distinguish the location of the signs, to define what constitutes them as signs, and to know how and by what laws they are linked, semiology" (Foucault 2005: 33).

The term "hermeneutics" also dominates Foucault's later works. It is reasonable to ask what the relationship might be between Foucault's hermeneutics and so-called "traditional hermeneutics" (from Schleiermacher to Gadamer). In addressing this complex question, I am inclined to defend the following position: just as Nietzsche's stance should not be conflated with traditional hermeneutics, nor should traditional hermeneutics be reduced to Nietzscheanism (as Rorty and Vattimo have done), so too should Foucault's paradigmatic positions not be equated with traditional hermeneutics (e.g., Gadamer's "philosophical hermeneutics"), nor should traditional hermeneutics be subsumed under Foucault's hermeneutics. In other words, the occasional points of contact between the positions of representatives of traditional hermeneutics (such as Gadamer) and those of Foucault do not justify concluding that these approaches share a paradigmatic co-dimension.

For example, it is important to note that the so-called critical theorist David C. Hoy, in defending Foucault's position against Habermas's criticism, uses the term "genealogical hermeneutics". He considered the latter as "a viable version of critical theory" (Hoy 1994: 207). Following Foucault, Hoy does not believe that one should start with some theory that is prior to criticism itself and at the same time is a transcendental condition for the latter's possibility, as is typical for Habermas. Hoy suggested that the study of history and various social practices itself be understood not as "revealing reality", but modally as "deconstructing necessity":

> "Critical theory conceived as genealogical hermeneutics may unmask substantive injustice, but it need not justify this unmasking through the methodological picture of inquiry presented by traditional theory. It need not construe itself as seeing through illusions and showing us how society really is. Instead, it can present itself as offering new interpretations. Along the way it may be unmasking previous interpretations. Since what is unmasked is self-interpretation, this unmasking through genealogical critical history can now be seen not simply in traditional epistemological terms as "revealing reality," but also modally as "deconstructing necessity." That is, genealogical research will show that self-understandings that are taken as universal, eternal, and necessary have a history, with a beginning, and therefore, possibly, an end. Genealogy thus shows that self-understandings are interpretations, and

it can bring us to suspect that conceptions of ourselves that we have taken to be necessary are only contingent. In making this contingency manifest, genealogy makes it possible for people to see how they could want to be different from how they are" (Ibid.: 207).

On the other hand, Hoy argues that we should not uncritically surrender to the discontinuous sequence of the sign system in Foucault's genealogy. He contends that we must also recognize the macrosocial "frames" that condition the actors of social action. Accordingly, Hoy sees the possibility of supplementing Foucault's "pure" genealogical hermeneutics with Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics. From a hermeneutical perspective, social actors are always subordinated to one or another social horizon, which can never be fully thematized by social actors. However, this common horizon can be thematized in different reflexive, interpretative profiles. Genealogical histories achieve this hermeneutical affect through the contrast between the present and the future, through "own" and "alien" practices. In this way, according to Hoy, "genealogical hermeneutics" seems to invite the expansion of interpretations and, being open to different interpretations, enrich the existing ones. Differences between interpretations and interpretative social practices should be recognized without the need to eliminate them. To what extent these "differences" between interpretations — understood as different social practices — should be tolerated is an empirical question, since there is no a priori definition of how everything happens or must happen. Therefore, "genealogical hermeneutics seeks to be *consistent*, but does not attempt to be *systematic*" (Ibid.: 178).

It is obvious that one can see the spatial connections between Foucault's "genealogical hermeneutics" (Hoy) or "genealogical historiography" (Habermas) and Gadamer's "philosophical hermeneutics", but these two approaches are separated by incommensurable and fundamentally different paradigms. Using Foucault's own vocabulary, one could say that genealogical and philosophical hermeneutical approaches are based on different and incommensurable "*historical a priori*".

Genealogical Treatment of History and Social Practices

Foucault, following Nietzsche, began to develop his so-called genealogical hermeneutics and focused his research on how various social discourses and practices are formed, why and how they appear and

disappear again. In this genealogical research, instead of metaphysical origins, deeply hidden meanings that can only be seen through pure cognition, or open intentionality, Foucault, as a genealogist, unmasked power relations in social practices and power strategies without strategists. In 1971, Foucault's article "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History" appeared in print, in which he presents his own version of Nietzsche and at the same time lays the foundations for his genealogy. Habermas, in a critical reaction to Foucault's genealogical research, stated that "Foucault owes the concept of an erudite-positivistic historiography in the appearance of an anti-science to his reception of Nietzsche" (Habermas 1998: 248–249).

Nietzsche himself metaphorically said that he is not interested in "blue", but in "gray" color, meaning that the genealogist is interested in everything "what is documented, what can actual1y be confirmed and has actually existed, in short the entire long hieroglyphic record, so hard to decipher, of the moral past of mankind!" (Nietzsche 1989: 21). At the conceptual level, the metaphorical distinction between "blue" and "gray" colors corresponds to the distinction between the metaphysically treated atopic and atemporal *Ursprung* and the spatially and temporally documented *Entstehung* and *Herkunft*[3].

Why does Nietzsche, as a genealogist, reject archetypal origin (*Ursprung*)? Because this metaphysical treatment of *origin* "assumes the existence of immobile forms that precede the external world of accident and succession. This search is directed to "that which was already there", the "very same" of an image of a primordial truth fully adequate to its nature, and it necessitates the removal of every mask to ultimately disclose an original identity" (Foucault 1998a: 371). However, the genealogist who chooses to "listen to history" and ceases to believe in metaphysics discovers, in the history of the origin of things, not their indestructible identity but the disagreement and difference among them.

Terms such as *Entstehung* or *Herkunft* describe the object of genealogy much more precisely. Therefore, according to Foucault, genealogy must not seek metaphysical origins (German: Ursprung) but rather aim to reveal the contingent temporal beginnings of the discourse formation, analyze the diversity of factual histories, and thereby disperse identity — primarily the supposed appearance of the subject who writes history and his contemporaries:

---

3   *Entstehung* by its meaning presupposes the temporal emergence, formation of something in time and in a specific place. It is problematic to distinguish *Ursprung* from *Entstehung* and *Herkunft* purely semantically. In Nietzsche's texts, the concepts *Entstehung* and *Herkunft* by their meaning refer not to some non-temporal metaphysical being but to the temporal emergence of a race or some type of social formation.

"Where the soul pretends unification or the Me fabricates a coherent identity, the genealogist sets out to study the beginning-numberless beginnings, whose faint traces and hints of color are readily seen by a historical eye. The analysis of descent (German: Herkunft, French: la provenance — A. M.) permits the dissociation of the Me, its recognition and displacement as an empty synthesis, in liberating a profusion of lost events" (Ibid.: 374).

Such a genealogy does not claim to turn back time or restore an uninterrupted, unified continuity beyond dispersion and oblivion. Nor does it seek to show that the past still lives in the present, continuing to animate it. Instead, it aims to reveal events in their characteristic dispersion and discontinuity, unraveling from the roots the fact that in all we know — and in which we ourselves exist — there is neither truth nor being, but only *the exteriority of different and individual cases*.

Another aspect of descent (German: Herkunft) is that it is related to the body. Following Nietzsche, Foucault argued that the body is the surface of the inscription of events. Genealogy, as an analysis of descent, is thus situated within the articulation of the body and history: "Its task is to expose a body totally imprinted by history and the process of history's destruction of the body" (Ibid.: 375–376). This insight was significant not only for Foucault but also for Deleuze. It is worth noting that structuralists (e. g. Claude Levi-Strauss) interpreted the social fabric as a system of exchange. In contrast, Deleuze and Guattari proposed a new „cartography of the libidinal body", which provides a basis for explaining sociality and social practices — topics also of interest to Foucault. The organization of savage and nomadic society is based not on *exchange*, but on *records*:

"The primitive territorial machine codes flows, invests organs, and marks bodies. To such a degree that circulating — exchanging — is a secondary activity in comparison with the task that sums up all the others: marking bodies, which are the earth's products. The essence of the recording, inscribing socius, insofar as it lays claim to the productive forces and distributes the agents of production, resides in these operations: tattooing, excising, incising, carving, scarifying, mutilating, encircling, and initiating" (Deleuze & Guattari 1983: 144).

In other words, the essence of such a registering and recording desire is to tattoo, to cut, to incise, to carve, to mutilate, to initiate. Foucault himself was also concerned with the "cartography of the body" mentioned by Deleuze. It is important to note that long before Foucault and Deleuze, Nietzsche called the sensual codification based

on "inscriptions" in bodies "morality of customs", i.e. a system of evaluations that has legal force and is inseparable from the establishment of bodily memory. Nietzsche asked: "How can one create a memory for the human animal? How can one impress something upon this partly obtuse, partly flighty mind, attuned only to the passing moment, in such a way that it will stay there?" (Nietzsche 1989: 60). Following Nietzsche, Deleuze similarly stated — like Foucault — that:

> "Man, who was constituted by means of an active faculty of forgetting (*oubli*), by means of a repression of biological memory, must create an *other* memory, one that is collective, a memory of words (*paroles*) and no longer a memory of things, a memory of signs and no longer of effects. This organization, which traces its signs directly on the body, constitutes a system of cruelty, a terrible alphabet" (Deleuze & Guattari 1983: 144–145).

This codification of the body produced by desire, described by Deleuze, as well as in Foucault's *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* — where history is portrayed as the history of the mind supervising and punishing social bodies — can essentially be identified with the bodily mnemonics[4] described by Nietzsche:

> "If something is to stay in the memory it must be burned in: only that which never ceases to hurt stays in the memory" — this is a main clause of the oldest (unhappily also the most enduring) psychology on earth; <...> Man could never do without blood, torture, and sacrifices when he felt the need to create a memory for himself; <...> All this has its origin in the instinct that realized that pain is the most powerful aid to mnemonics. <...> The worse man's memory has been, the more fearful bas been the appearance of his customs; <...> Ah, reason, seriousness, mastery over the affects, the whole somber thing called reflection, all these prerogatives and showpieces of man: how dearly they have been bought! how much blood and cruelty lie at the bottom of all "good things"!" (Nietzsche 1989: 61–62).

The social practice of cruelty described by Nietzsche — marking the body to create memory — has nothing to do with vague, undefined, or accidental coercion. According to Deleuze, cruelty is far from accidental; it is the internal engine of culture itself, which cuts, carves, mutilates, initiates, and marks bodies. It is the memory of the "burnt"

---

4   For more information on bodily mnemonics and social practices, see: Mickevičius A. 2008.

body, a memory initiated in history by the punishing and supervising mind. In their descriptions of various social practices, both Deleuze and Foucault clearly allude to the "mnemonics" Nietzsche described, even though they do not explicitly use that term themselves:

"The sign is a position of desire; but the first signs are the territorial signs that plant their flags in bodies. And if one wants to call this inscription in naked flesh "writing", then it must be said that speech in fact presupposes writing, and that it is this cruel system of inscribed signs that renders man capable of language, and gives him a memory of the spoken word" (Deleuze & Guattari 1983: 145).

Writing is not an orphan of language (Plato). On the contrary, writing is primary — it is the writing of a burnt, tattooed body. Language, like memory, is established in history and grounded in the inscriptions borne by this burnt, desecrated body. It is precisely such social practices of cruelty that Foucault had in mind when he stated that the task of genealogy, as an analysis of descent (*Herkunft*), is "to expose a body totally imprinted by history and the process of history's as destruction of the body" (Foucault 1998a: 375–376). Foucault, following Nietzsche, convincingly described this mnemonic of the body, initiated by the mind that punishes social bodies, in his work *Discipline and Punish*. Since Plato's time, the programmatic aspiration has been to free the soul from the prison of the body. Although this goal was achieved, the liberated "soul" or mind ended up enslaving the "body." From this tension emerges the positive aspiration shared by both Deleuze and Foucault: to free imprisoned desire and its flows from all forms of repression. Like Nietzsche, Foucault sought to liberate the body from the prison imposed by the supervising and punishing soul. For Foucault, this aspiration manifests as an attempt to reveal how the "soul" or mind disciplines and punishes unruly social bodies, leaving lasting stigmas upon them.

Another feature that becomes important for Foucault when discussing Nietzsche's genealogy is that the *Entstehung* of genealogy refers to the appearance or moment of surfacing of something: "*Entstehung* designates *emergence*, the moment of arising. It stands as the principle and the singular law of an apparition" (Foucault 1998a: 376). Appearance, according to Foucault, always takes place "in a particular state of forces" (Ibid.: 376). In other words, appearance and surfacing are the eruption of forces with their energy and the leap from "backstage" to "the stage". What Nietzsche called the "*Entstehungsherd* of the concept of goodness is not specifically the energy of the strong or the reaction of the weak, but precisely this scene where they are

displayed superimposed or face to face" (Ibid.: 377). It is clear that Foucault has in mind here the principle of the *Will to Power*, manifested in different types of forces — active and reactive.

Foucault instrumentally adopted this Nietzschean treatment of "power" as one of the most important elements of his genealogical paradigm, and today's attempts to distinguish between what Foucault and what Nietzsche meant when they spoke of "power" rather evoke the effect of hands drawing themselves, as in the lithograph *Drawing Hands* by the Dutch graphic artist M. C. Escher. Deleuze presented an excellent six-point dissection of Foucault's concept of "power" in the chapter "The New Cartographer" in *Foucault* (Deleuze 2006: 23–44). The Will to Power is not a substance, not a self-identical being, but a "difference" that appears in the relationship of forces. It is not only suppressive but also productive, i.e. it produces new forms of knowledge and new social practices, which are always forms and practices of power. It is not someone's property but a strategy. Foucault never abandoned this Nietzschean position.

Therefore, according to Foucault, it would be a mistake to assume, based on traditional beliefs, that a general war will subside in its own contradictions and end with the renunciation of violence in the peace of civil law. On the contrary, "the law is the calculated pleasure of relentlessness. It is the promised blood, which permits the perpetual instigation of new dominations and the staging of meticulously repeated scenes of violence" (Foucault 1998a: 378). Every law, agreement or peace is only a pretext for a new war and discord. Foucault wants to say that every peace, whatever it may be, is not a rule, but rather a temporary exception to the rule. This reminds us of Heraclitus: "it is necessary to know that war is general, and truth is strife and everything is born of strife. War is the father of all, the king of all. He made some slaves, others free." Only this Heraclitean and Nietzschean adapted insight, which Foucault applies as an paradigm to explain social practices and history, should rather be understood not prescriptively, but descriptively. In other words, Habermas was concerned with transcendentally justifying what history and communication in social practices should be. In contrast to Habermas, Foucault — as a genealogist and a keeper of the "gray" color — was more concerned with descriptively showing what history and communication were prevalent in social practices.

It is from this Nietzschean genealogical perspective — one that presupposes a description of real history — that we should evaluate the three types of history distinguished by Foucault. He uses these types to unmask metaphysical and transcendental approaches to history, corresponding to the three Platonic modalities of historical interpretation:

1. The parodic and farcical treatment of reality, which is opposed to the subject of history as remembrance or (re)cognition (French: reminiscence or reconnaissance);

2. A dissociative and destructive treatment of identity, which is opposed to history or tradition given as an uninterrupted continuity;

3. A sacrificial treatment of truth and a destructive attitude toward it, which is opposed to history as scientific knowledge (French: connaissance) (Ibid.: 385–386).

First, a parody- or farce-based approach to history reveals that, to the anonymous and confused European — who does not truly know his own identity — the historian often presents various substitutes for identity, portraying them as more individualized and authentic, as if some kind of "costume" could conceal his anonymous shame. However, the genealogist, distinguished by a historical sensibility, takes none of this seriously and regards these substitutes with suspicion, recognizing them as mere masquerade costumes:

> "The hybrid mixed man of Europe — a fairly ugly plebeian, all in all — absolutely must have a costume: he needs history as a storage closet of costumes. Of course, he notices that nothing really looks right on him, — he keeps changing. <...> Perhaps it's that we still discover a realm of our *invention* here, a realm where we can still be original too, as parodists of world history or buffoons of God, or something like that, — perhaps it's that, when nothing else from today has a future, our *laughter* is the one thing that does!" (Nietzsche 2002: 113–114).

Here we encounter a parody of the type of "monumental history" singled out in Nietzsche's *On the Use and Abuse of History for Life*. Monumental history, as parody, appears to the genealogist as a pre-arranged and staged carnival.

Secondly, the genealogist's overtly dissociative treatment of identity involves an unmasking approach: identity is not a metaphysical given that can persist unchanged throughout history. Rather, the subject is multiple, with identity formed through various, constantly shifting social practices. In this regard, no force of transcendental synthesis can overcome these changes — identities split, pass away, and remain mortal, often defying comprehension within temporal traditions. Therefore, the goal of genealogically treated history is not to uncover the roots of our identity but to unmask them — not to return to the transcendental or metaphysical ancestry posited by traditional philosophy, but to reveal and make perceptible the ruptures and interruptions that shape us. This genealogical approach stands in stark contrast to "antiquarian history," which focuses on identifying and

preserving continuities — such as our homeland or language — that are deemed essential to safeguard and transmit to future generations.

The third destructive interpretation of history is an interpretation that sacrifices truth and the subject of knowledge (French: connaissance). Only by assuming a "mask" can the knowing subject appear impartial, neutral, and speak of objective knowledge of history. As Nietzsche said: "People should rethink their ideas about cruelty and open up their eyes; <...> This is my claim: Almost everything we call "higher culture" is based on the spiritualization and deepening of cruelty. <...> There is a drop of cruelty even in every wanting-to-know" (Ibid.: 120–121). In other words, following Nietzsche and sacrificing the "pure" subject of knowledge, Foucault wants to say that behind the festive words as "genuine honesty, love of truth, love of wisdom, sacrifice for knowledge, the heroism of truthfulness" (Ibid.: 123) lies the *Will to Power*. He wants to say that no "pure", i.e. objective, knowledge of history is possible, there is no society without coercive relations and influences of power. Foucault argued: "We should admit rather that power produces knowledge; <...> that power and knowledge directly imply one another; that there is no power relation without the correlative constitution of a field of knowledge, nor any knowledge that does not presuppose and constitute at the same time power relations" (Foucault 1998c: 27).

Therefore, the further conclusion that follows logically from such a position taken by Foucault is that the relations of power and knowledge should not be analyzed on the basis of a subject of knowledge that is free or not free from these relations. Therefore, in his study of various social practices, Foucault takes the following position:

> "These 'power-knowledge relations' are to be analysed, therefore, not on the basis of a subject of knowledge who is or is not free in relation to the power system, but, on the contrary, the subject who knows, the objects to be known and the modalities of knowledge must be regarded as so many effects of these fundamental implications of power-knowledge and their historical transformations. In short, it is not the activity of the subject of knowledge that produces a corpus of knowledge, useful or resistant to power, but power-knowledge, the processes and struggles that traverse it and of which it is made up, that determines the forms and possible domains of knowledge" (Ibid.: 27–28).

It is precisely this Foucauldian approach — instrumentally adopted from Nietzsche — that Habermas fundamentally disagreed with.

The Problem of Legitimation of Genealogical History
and Criticism of Social Practices

Foucault's genealogical approach to the study of history and social practices has been criticized by Habermas. He argued that in Foucault's theory, "power," without his intention, actually becomes a quasi-transcendental basis for speaking of a genealogical historiography that is oriented towards the critique of reason. According to Habermas, Foucault's theory is made aporetic by the fact that in his concept of "power" he "has forced together the idealistic idea of transcendental synthesis with the presuppositions of an empiricist ontology". However, according to Habermas, "this approach cannot lead to a way out of the philosophy of the subject, because the concept of power <...> has been taken from the repertoire of the philosophy of the subject itself". (Habermas 1998: 274).

According to this philosophy, the subject can take up basically two relationships toward the world of imaginable and manipulable objects: "cognitive relationships regulated by the truth of judgments; and practical relationships regulated by the success of actions" (Ibid.: 274). Habermas tends to take the view that "power is that by which the subject has an effect on objects in successful actions. In this, success in action depends upon the truth of the judgments that enter into the plan of action; via the criterion of success in action, power remains dependent on truth" (Ibid.: 274). The essence of the disagreement between Habermas and Foucault lies in Foucault's abrupt reversal of the traditional relationship: instead of truth depending on power, Foucault asserts the power-dependency of truth. In this formulation, foundational power is no longer bound to the competencies of acting and judging subjects — power becomes subjectless. Summing up his critique of Foucault's theory, Habermas stated:

> "Genealogical historiography grounded on the theory of power proposes three substitutions: In place of the hermeneutic elucidation of contexts of meaning, there is an analysis of structures that are meaningless in themselves; validity claims are of interest only as functions of power complexes; value judgments — in general, the problem of justifying criticism — are excluded in favor of value-free historical explanations. <...> Genealogical historiography emerges from its cocoon as precisely the *presentistic, relativistic, cryptonormative* illusory science that it does not want to be" (Ibid.: 275–276).

Without assuming the position of a judge in determining which of the two is correct, the most productive solution may be to abandon

universal normativism and, drawing on Deleuze's metaphor of the "toolbox," adopt a purely instrumentalist stance: both Habermas's model of "communicative action" and Foucault's model of "genealogy," while paradigmatically distinct, are equally valuable and important for the analysis of social practices. As is well known, Habermas sets out "validity claims" (*Geltungsansprüche*) for his model of "ideal communication" and distinguishes three types: truth (*Wahrheit*), normative rightness (*Richtigkeit*), and subjective sincerity (*Wahrhaftigkeit*). It can be argued that Foucault, in his own way, meets the Habermasian test of "validity claims." The essential difference lies in the grounding: Foucault does not root these claims in transcendental subjectivity, as Habermas does, but instead in genealogical reasoning. In other words, the crux of their divergence is that Foucault adopts a position of nominalist particularism, whereas Habermas maintains a commitment to abstract transcendental universalism.

Foucault admitted in a 1983 interview that France was not, or was poorly, indirectly, familiar with critical theory:

"When I was a student, I can assure you that I never once heard the name of the Frankfurt School mentioned by any of my professors. <...> If I had been aware of it at the time, I would not have said a number of stupid things that I did say, and I would have avoided many of the detours I made while trying to pursue my own humble path — when, meanwhile, avenues had been opened up by the Frankfurt School" (Foucault 1998 b: 440).

Noting the importance and value of the Frankfurt School, Foucault emphasized a different correlation than Habermas between "rationalization" and "power": "I think that the word "rationalization" is dangerous. What we have to do is analyze specific rationalities rather than always invoking the progress of rationalization in general" (Foucault 2001a: 329). Contrary to Habermas, Foucault suggested another way to go further toward a new economy of power relations, a way that is more empirical, more directly related to our present situation, and one that implies more relations between theory and practice: "Rather than analyzing power from the point of view of its internal rationality, it consists of analyzing power relations through the antagonism of strategies" (Ibid.: 329). Foucault indicated in two points the difference and disagreement related to the *ahistorical nature* of Habermas's thinking and the *utopianism* of the project he was developing:

"The idea that there could exist a state of communication that would allow games of truth to circulate freely, without any constraints or

coercive effects, seems utopian to me. This is precisely a failure to see that power relations are not something that is bad in itself, that we have to break free of. I do not think that a society can exist without power relations, if by that one means the strategies by which individuals try to direct and control the conduct of others. The problem, then, is not to try to dissolve them in the utopia of completely transparent communication but to acquire the rules of law, the management techniques, and also the morality, the ethos, the practice of the self, that will allow us to play these games of power with as little domination as possible" (Foucault 1997: 298).

According to Foucault, the problem for Habermas lies in his attempt to make a transcendental mode of thought emerge against any form of historicism. In this regard, Foucault described himself as "far more historicist and Nietzschean" in comparison with Habermas (Foucault 2001b: 359). Conceptually, however, Foucault most clearly outlined his programmatic vision for the possibility of genealogical history and the critique of social practices in the article "What is Enlightenment?", prepared in 1984 for a conference planned in the United States — an event to which Habermas was also invited, but which never took place due to Foucault's unexpected death.

Foucault proposed that the Enlightenment should not be understood as an epoch, but rather as a specific *attitude* of modernity — a particular *ethos* related to our own discursive practices. Transforming I. Kant's ideas in his own way, Foucault understood *criticism* as the analysis of limits and reflection on them. Whereas Kantian criticism was concerned with the boundaries of knowledge — boundaries which knowledge itself must not attempt to cross — Foucault reconceived criticism as *practical criticism*, which should positively engage with the possibility of crossing those boundaries.

The realization of such critique, he argued, should not be understood as the search for universal formal structures, but "rather as a historical investigation into the events that have led us to constitute ourselves and to recognize ourselves as subjects of what we are doing, thinking, saying" (Foucault 1984: 46). Such a critique, Foucault noted, "is not transcendental and does not aim to make possible any metaphysics: it is genealogical in its purpose, but archaeological in its method" (Ibid.). Foucault's criticism is archaeological but not transcendental, in the sense that it "[does] not seek to identify the universal structures of all knowledge or of all possible moral action, but will seek to treat the instances of discourse that articulate what we think, say, and do as so many historical events" (Ibid.: 46). Likewise, according to Foucault, "critique will be genealogical in the sense that

it will not deduce from the form of what we are what it is impossible for us to do and to know; <…> It is not seeking to make possible a metaphysics that has finally become a science; it is seeking to give new impetus, as far and wide as possible, to the undefined work of freedom" (Ibid.: 46).

Conclusion

The concepts "hermeneutics" and "genealogy" used by Foucault imply a conjunction, and the object of research of "genealogical hermeneutics" is the interpretation of history and social practices. Based on Nietzsche, Foucault developed hermeneutics as an interpretive practice that is, first, not oriented toward metaphysical searches for depth; second, inexhaustible in nature; and third, prior to signifiers, as it does not reveal or clarify their pre-given meanings but instead establishes them.

Such interpretive practice is not denied but rather methodologically extended and deepened by genealogical research, which, instead of seeking metaphysical origins or deeply hidden meanings accessible only through pure cognition, open intentionality, and transcendentality, unmasks relations of power in history and social practices — exposing strategies of power without strategists. In a positive sense, Foucault understands "genealogical hermeneutics" as a body of knowledge and techniques that make signs speak and thus reveal their meanings. It is oriented towards a critical understanding of social practices that are permeated by mechanisms of power.

One fundamental difference between Nietzsche and Foucault lies in their treatment of cognition, morality, and social practices: Nietzsche often grounds these in the subjective tactics of individual actors, whereas Foucault fully depsychologizes this approach, viewing psychological motivations not as sources but as effects of power strategies without strategists.

In this respect, Foucault's "genealogical hermeneutics" stands in paradigmatic contrast to Gadamer's "philosophical hermeneutics," which centers on the search for phenomenologically transformed truth manifesting in various forms, the transcendental justification of the continuity of intended meaning from the past to the present, and the preservation of historical and cultural tradition.

The genealogical hermeneutics developed by Foucault has been rigorously critiqued by Habermas. At the core of their disagreement lies Foucault's inversion of the relationship between power, subject, and truth: Foucault conceives power not as dependent on the subject

and truth, but rather the subject and truth as dependent on power. This raises a fundamental question: if power is non-subjective, how can one meaningfully criticize the strategies of power without strategists embedded in social practices? Foucault envisions a distinct set of possibilities and objectives for the critique of history and social practices compared to Habermas.

Firstly, Foucault adopts a stance of nominalist particularism, whereas Habermas grounds his theory in abstract transcendental universalism.

Secondly, Foucault rejects Habermas's model of ideal communication as ahistorical and utopian, arguing that in reality, no such ideal communicative situation exists — societies are invariably permeated by power relations that constrain the free circulation of truth claims.

Thirdly, Foucault contends that the task of critique is not to abolish power relations in pursuit of a rational utopia of ideal communication but rather to develop legal norms, managerial techniques, and an ethical stance that enable the exercise of power with the least possible domination.

Finally, Foucault's approach to critiquing history and social practices — developed instrumentally through Nietzschean insights — should not be understood as a search for formal structures of universal validity. Rather, it constitutes a historical investigation into the events that have shaped our self-recognition as subjects of our actions, thoughts, and speech, serving simultaneously as a call and a task to expand the boundaries of our freedom.

References

Deleuze, G. & Guattari, F. (1983). *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Deleuze, G. (2006). *Foucault*. Minneapolis; London: University of Minnesota Press.

Gadamer, H. G. (1989). *Text and Interpretation*. In *Dialogue and Deconstruction: The Gadamer-Derrida Encounter*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.

Hoy, David C. & McCarthy, Thomas (1994). *Critical Theory*. Oxford: Blackwell.

Habermas, J. (1998). *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity: Twelve Lectures*. Cambridge: Polity Press in association with Blackwell Publishers Ltd.

Foucault, M. & Deleuze, G. (1977). Intellectuals and Power. In D. F. Bouchard (Ed.), *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

Foucault, M. (1984). What Is Enlightenment? In P. Rabinow (Ed.), *The Foucault Reader*. New York: Pantheon Books.

Foucault, M. (1994). *Le retour de la morale. In Dits et écrits, 1954–1988*, tome IV: 1980–1988. Paris: Éditions Gallimard. — In Fr.

Foucault, M. (1997). The Ethics of the Concern for Self as a Practice of Freedom. In P. Rabinow (Ed.), *Ethics, Subjectivity and Truth: The Essential Works of Foucault, 1954–1984*, Vol. 1. New York: The New Press.

Foucault, M. (1998). Nietzsche, Freud, Marx. In J. D. Faubion (Ed.), *Aesthetics, Method, and Epistemology: Essential Works of Foucault, 1954–1984*, Vol. 2. New York: The New Press.

Foucault, M. (1998a). Nietzsche, Genealogy, History. In J. D. Faubion (Ed.), *Aesthetics, Method, and Epistemology: Essential Works of Foucault, 1954–1984*, Vol. 2. New York: The New Press.

Foucault, M. (1998b). Structuralism and Poststructuralism. In J. D. Faubion (Ed.), *Aesthetics, Method, and Epistemology: Essential Works of Foucault, 1954–1984*, Vol. 2. New York: The New Press.

Foucault, M. (1998c). *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. New York: Vintage Books, A Division of Random House, Inc.

Foucault, M. (2001a). The Subject and Power. In J. D. Faubion (Ed.), *Power: The Essential Works of Foucault, 1954–1984*, Vol. 3. New York: The New Press.

Foucault, M. (2001b). Space, Knowledge, and Power. In J. D. Faubion (Ed.), *Power: The Essential Works of Foucault, 1954–1984*, Vol. 3. New York: The New Press.

Foucault, M. (2005). *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences*. London; New York: Routledge.

Mickevičius, A. (2008). G. Deleuze kūniškoji mnemonika ir socialinės geismo mašinos. *Problemos, Priedas*, 87–95.

Nietzsche, F. (1998). *On the Genealogy of Morals*. Translated by Walter Kaufmann & R. J. Hollingdale. New York: Vintage Books, A Division of Random House, Inc.

Nietzsche, F. (2002). *Beyond Good and Evil: Prelude to a Philosophy of the Future*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.