

## Nietzsche & Foucault on Genealogy

PHIL 449, S14

### Nietzschean genealogy

1. A. Ridley, *Nietzsche's Conscience* (Cornell UP, 1998)

“Genealogy—most succinctly—is the attempt to show us how we have become what we are, so that we may see what we might yet become ...” (8).

2. M. Forster, “Genealogy” (*American Dialectic* 1:2 (2011))

-- genealogy contributes to our self-understanding by allowing us to see the “non-universality and dispensability” of moral concepts, values, customs, etc. (242); see, e.g., the first section of the Preface in GM

-- by comparing with entirely different views on morality (e.g., that of “nobles”)

-- by showing that our moral views are “products of historical developments before which they did not really exist at all” (245)

B. Leiter, *Nietzsche on Morality* (Routledge, 2002)

-- N's genealogy shows that “the value or meaning of the genealogical object is discontinuous over time ...” (168)

-- refers to GM II.12 where N notes that punishment has different purposes over time, due to different interpretations thru different wills to power—morality is similar

-- also a critical purpose: “the ultimate goal of the *Genealogy* ... is to free nascent higher human beings from their false consciousness” about the value of their current moral values, “their false belief that [it] is *good* for them” (176).

3. Owen p. 65: three demands of genealogy as project of re-evaluation of values (already talked about these in regards to N's audience)

### Foucauldian genealogy

*Koopman, “What Problematization Is”*

1. unlike Nietzsche, Foucault isn't trying to subvert values with genealogy: isn't using genealogy to make normative claims about what is good or bad

2. instead, he uses genealogy to “clarify and intensify the dangers of the present” (88)

a. Foucault is “discerning dangers rather than demonstrating defects” (88)

-- e.g., quotes from Koopman on pp. 89, 94

b. *what is the difference between showing dangers and defects?*

Class discussion

- dangerous: more malicious than a defect
- dangers: only problematic from where we are, our particular here and now
- dangerous: what's happening now might be defective, but it might not; something we need to consider further
- we need to understand exactly what is going on if we're going to make the decision about whether our practices are good or bad—Foucault is providing us with tools to have that understanding
- a road is not defective just because there's a sign warning "danger ahead"
- Foucault may be doing an internal critique of his audiences' practices: we should see the danger from our point of view our normative judgments, not that Foucault is necessarily making normative judgments himself

3. what genealogy is, for Foucault

a. an "analytic and diagnostic project": explaining a set of practices "that have contingently coalesced" and that "condition our possibilities for acting, thinking, and being in the present" (93)

-- Todd May, *The Philosophy of Foucault*, Chapter 1 (optional reading): "...we are *this* rather than *that* as a matter of contingency, not necessity. We did not have to be *this* ... which means, among other things, that we do not have to continue to be *this*" (11).

b. genealogy studies "problematizations"

(i). quotes from Foucault in Koopman pp. 93, 94

(ii). interview with Foucault called "problematics" (1983), in Sylvère Lotringer, ed. *Foucault Live* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed., Semiotext(e))

-- Problematization occurs when something that was "given" becomes a "question"; it involves "thought" as the process of "step[ping] back from [a] way of acting or reacting, to present it to oneself as an object of thought and to question it as to its meaning, its conditions and its goals" (421)

-- "for a field of action, a behavior, to enter the domain of thought, it is necessary for a certain number of factors to have made it uncertain, to have made it lose its familiarity, or to have provoked a certain number of difficulties around it" (421)

(iii). "What our present is," interview with Foucault (from 1983)

-- MF writes "the history of *problematizations*, that is, the history of the way in which things become a problem. How, why and in what way does madness become a problem in the modern world, and why has it become an important one?" (414)

(iv). Koopman: to understand current institutions & practices, “we must understand the problematizations to which they are a response” (98); present practices and institutions have developed out of past problematizations (100)

-- “practices”: “complex compositions of techniques, beliefs, styles, powers, knowledges, and ethics” (101)

-- problematization involves both showing how previous practices are no longer effective at achieving their goals, and developing new practices to replace them (100)

-- problematizations thus “act as a kind of hinge by way of which we transition out of old practices and into new ones” (101)

c. genealogy also engages in problematization itself

(i). Foucault’s genealogies intensify the problematizations he studies, “thus further problematizing ... the practices that have been elaborated” (Koopman 99).

-- his genealogies “contribute to the ongoing reproduction of problematizations already underway” (99)

(ii). “What our present is” interview: MF finds practices and institutions that are already “fragile” to some extent, and engages in genealogical history of them (411), making them “more fragile” (412)

-- *is this notion of Foucauldian genealogy as intensifying “problematization” the same as what Koopman said earlier about genealogy showing things to be problematic in terms of presenting “dangers”?*

d. Koopman’s summary of the above: “genealogists study the way in which problematizations contingently emerge from the intersection of a complex set of practices to form the conditions of possibility of future practices” (102).

(i). the problematizations, and the practices that result from them, do not emerge from the intentions of one or a few people (107)

-- Foucault, *The History of Sexuality Volume I*: there are certain “aims and objectives” held by particular persons, but the overall set of practices that result are not traceable to any one or a few such objectives. (95)

-- e.g., the practice of punishing through putting people in prison can’t be traced to a strategy put in place by any particular group, but is the result of a complex interplay of actions by multiple groups

-- “the logic is perfectly clear, the aims decipherable, and yet it is often the case that no one is there to have invented them, and few who can be said to have formulated them” (*History of Sexuality Vol. I* 95)

(ii). showing the conditions of possibility for how we think and act today:

“The object of Foucault’s histories is to discern the conditions of possibility—not of any object of thought whatsoever, but rather of distinctive objects whose possibility for our was of thinking and doing are constitutive of our historical present” (Koopman 112; this part of the article was optional)

-- MF looking at “the background conditions” for our current practices: e.g., not just asking who built a prison and why, but “how it came to be that it ever became possible to build such a thing as a prison” (113)

-- see, e.g., “What Our Present Is” p. 412

## **Foucault, “What Our Present Is”**

1. analyzing collective experiences of things like madness, punishment, sexuality

-- “is there not a cultural and social structuring of the experience of madness?” (408)

-- “is there an experience of madness which is characteristic of a given society?” (408)

2. focusing on particular sorts of collective experiences: “borderline experiences”

-- “these forms of experiences that instead of being considered central, of being positively valued in a society, are deemed to be borderline experiences which put into question what is usually considered acceptable” (409)

-- e.g., madness, criminal delinquency, “abnormal” sexualities

3. determine how such collective experiences emerged: historically analyze “the group of institutions and practices” from which they emerged” (408)

4. consider also what new objects of knowledge develop through these historical processes, how and why

-- “how was madness presented as an object of knowledge for a kind of medicine which identified itself as mental medicine?” (408)