Genealogy Between Health and Illness: On the Ambiguity of the Historical Sense in Foucault's 1969â€“1970 Vincennes Lectures on Nietzsche

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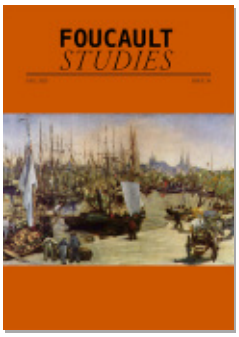

Foucault Studies, Issue 38, Fall 2025, pp. 50-73 (Article)

Published by University of Pennsylvania Press
DOI: https://doi.org/10.1353/fou.00013

FOUCAULT
STUDIES

ARTICLE

Genealogy Between Health and Illness: On the Ambiguity of the Historical Sense in Foucault's 1969–1970 Vincennes Lectures on Nietzsche

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ABSTRACT. This article revisits Foucault's reading of Nietzsche, with a special focus on the medical metaphors surrounding the definition and practice of genealogy. It argues that, in addition to the emphasis on the notion of *diagnosis* as a key medically inspired element of genealogy, it is important to consider an aspect that has been significantly less explored in existing scholarship on Foucault's appropriation of Nietzsche's philosophy: that of genealogy as a "curative" art or as a "science of remedies." Hence the article presents Nietzsche as a thinker of health and disease, and his views on the philosopher as a kind of physician. Then, it moves on to examine the "historical sense" as a notion that plays a key role in Foucault's reading of Nietzsche in his 1969–1970 lectures at Vincennes and his definition of genealogy as a practice of history that both emerges from epochal disease and points to possible forms of healing. My claim is that, in the Vincennes lectures on Nietzsche, the historical sense can be described as something that can poison and heal, and as a process of immanent critique of the present, carrying the possibility of its transfiguration.

Keywords: Foucault, Nietzsche, genealogy, historical sense, medicine, health and disease

INTRODUCTION

Michel Foucault has referred to himself as "simply Nietzschean."[1] Indeed, Nietzsche is a reference constantly operating in the background of Foucault's work, from the preface to the *History of Madness*, which he describes as a "first" study on "this long line of enquiry [. . .] beneath the sun of the great Nietzschean quest,"[2] to his final lectures at the Collège de France, *The Courage of Truth*, where he discusses Nietzsche's interpretation of Socrates.[3]

[1] FL, 471.
[2] HM, xxx.
[3] See, particularly, his discussion of Nietzsche's interpretation of the *Phaedo* (GS §340) in the lecture of 15 February 1984 (CT, 98–102).

DOI: https://doi.org/10.1353/fou.00013

However, under the mask of this alleged simplicity, one finds a whole range of readings, uses, and appropriations of Nietzsche by Foucault,[4] in such a way that we could apply to his own work his claim that there is "no single Nietzscheanism."[5] Alan Rosenberg and Joseph Westfall claim that "Foucault is at his most Nietzschean" where he "uses Nietzsche to find himself."[6] In fact, in a way, one could say that Foucault is most Foucauldian where he claims to be following Nietzsche,[7] which occurs on key occasions of conceptual displacement and philosophical invention. In his 1973 lectures at PUC-Rio, "Truth and Juridical Forms," Foucault states that he takes up Nietzsche's texts "in terms of" his "own interests."[8] His question, then, is "what serious use can Nietzsche be put to?"[9] On the other hand, Foucault resorts to Nietzsche in moments when he seeks to think differently, to "pull himself free of himself,"[10] or to playfully escape the coordinates of his time.

In 1983, Foucault states that he had "lectured on Nietzsche but written very little about him."[11] Despite the consistent reference to Nietzsche in interviews and published monographs,[12] the two main texts on Nietzsche that Foucault published during his lifetime, "Nietzsche, Freud, Marx" (presented at the Colloque de Royaumont in 1964 and published in 1967)[13] and "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History" (published in 1971),[14] have for a long time constituted the main available documents for understanding how Foucault situated his thought in relation to that of the German philosopher. This is especially the case for the 1971 piece, given its clear textual and philological work, and its particular attention to the key features of genealogy. The publication of *Nietzsche: Cours, conférences et travaux* (2024) opens a new terrain of analysis, revealing important theoretical elements

[4] Bernard Harcourt identifies five modes of Foucault's use of Nietzsche: "critical," "epistemological," "linguistic," "alethurgic," and "political" (Bernard E. Harcourt, "Five Modalities of Michel Foucault's Use of Nietzsche's Writings (1959–73)" [2021], 3).

[5] "I do not believe there is a single Nietzscheanism. There are no grounds for believing that there is a true Nietzscheanism, or that ours is truer than others" (EW2, 445). Cf. Alan Rosenberg and Joseph Westfall, "Introduction" (2018), 3.

[6] Rosenberg and Westfall, "Introduction," 5.

[7] In this, I agree with Aner Barzilay when he claims that "Nietzsche served as an elastic philosophical frame that enabled Foucault to reshape his method to suit the historical and intellectual context in which he operated" (Aner Barzilay, "Nietzsche, Ontology, and Foucault's Critical Project" [2023], 202).

[8] DE1, 1418; EW3, 13. In 1973, what is at stake is a Nietzschean "historical model for the analysis of the politics of truth." See also Harcourt, "Five Modalities," 17.

[9] EW2, 443.

[10] "The idea of a limit-experience that wrenches the subject from itself is what was important to me in my reading of Nietzsche"; "I've always conceived of them [my books] as direct experiences aimed at pulling myself free of myself, at preventing me from being the same" (EW3, 241–242).

[11] EW3, 445.

[12] To this we could add his edition, with Gilles Deleuze, of a (then) new translation of Nietzsche's complete works, drawing on the Colli-Montinari edition; see "Michel Foucault et Gilles Deleuze veulent render a Nietzsche son vrai visage" (DE1, 577–579) and "Introduction générale aux *Oeuvres philosophiques de complètes* de F. Nietzsche" (DE1, 589–592). See also the Nietzsche lecture in LWK, 202–223.

[13] DE1, 592–607; EW2, 269–78.

[14] DE1, 1004–24; FR, 76–100.

in the development of Foucault's thinking before the 1964/1967 text, and documenting the genesis of the 1971 piece. Reading the 1969–1970 Vincennes lectures published in the volume can shed light upon Foucault's rereading of Nietzsche, which according to Daniel Defert took place in the summer of 1967,[15] and which leads to the synthesis presented in "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History" — a text that, as Bernard Harcourt claims, was "imagined and composed over the period from 1967 to 1970."[16]

My aim in this article is to propose a fresh perspective on Foucault's relation to Nietzsche, exploring interpretive possibilities afforded by reading his 1969–1970 lectures at Vincennes. My goal is to further illuminate the ways in which Foucault's view on, and deployment of, genealogy is rooted in Nietzsche's critical project, especially *vis-à-vis* its definition of it as a *medical* practice. The medical element of genealogy has often (and rightly) been associated with the practice of *diagnosis* — a notion that precedes Foucault's articulation of his own method and philosophical *ethos* in genealogical terms, and runs clearly through his work, at least since the texts and interviews of the 1960s, and in recently published materials from that period, such as *Le Discours Philosophique,* until the late 1970s and early 1980s, such as in the different versions of "What is Aufklärung?" (or in "What Is Critique?").[17] However, less focus has been placed upon a different dimension of this medical metaphor, which leads Foucault to interpret genealogy, in 1971, as a "curative science" or a "science of remedies."[18] This article seeks to explore this dimension in particular, showing how it is not neglected by Foucault in his reading and appropriation of Nietzsche.

In the first section, I set the grounds for the discussion by pointing to the centrality of the problem of disease and health as a unifying thread in Nietzsche's work and as one of the keys for understanding Foucault's reading of it. In the second section, I discuss the importance Nietzsche attributes to a philosophical inquiry on poisons and remedies, as well as to the role of the philosopher as a type of 'physician.' I then move on, in the third section, to analyze the notion of 'historical sense' as an expression of an epochal disease, which occupies a pivotal role in Foucault's reading of Nietzsche and his definition of genealogy as a practice of history that emerges from sickness but points to forms of healing and allows for the cultivation of certain virtues. This leads me to a discussion of the ambivalent role of the historical sense in Foucault's reading of Nietzsche, both as an illness which figures in the diagnosis of our historical present, and as an index of a dynamic of immanent historical critique and possibility of renewed action in the present.[19] My claim is that the historical sense can be described, especially in the Vincennes lectures, as both (1) a type of

[15] Daniel Defert, "Chronologie," DE1, 41. Cf. Stuart Elden, *The Birth of Power* (2017), 10, 31; Harcourt, "Five Modalities," 10.
[16] Harcourt, "Five Modalities," 10.
[17] FR, 32–50.
[18] FR, 90. On this, see Michael Ure and Federico Testa, "Foucault and Nietzsche" (2018).
[19] On Nietzsche's analysis of *décadence* as part of an "immanent critique of modernity," see Daniel Conway, "The Politics of Decadence" (1999), e.g. 26–28.

'*pharmakon*,' something that can poison or heal, a virtue or a vice, according to the type of use and dosage adopted, and (2) a process marked by an immanent movement that hosts in itself the possibility of its own transfiguration.

"MY TRUEST EXPERIENCE": NIETZSCHE, THINKER OF HEALTH AND DISEASE

The reflection on the pair disease-health is a fundamental problem in Nietzsche's work. It appears in different contexts, from his narration of his own sufferings and the challenges he faced in moments of illness,[20] to the analyses of his culture and time under the figures of the historical sense, *décadence* or nihilism, for example. These two dimensions, the state of individual health (in terms of the physiology and the body as well as the health of the soul), on the one hand, and the diagnosis of disease of a culture, a people, an epoch, on the other, often intersect. Nietzsche's analysis frequently starts with *himself*. But the attention he gives to the particular dynamic and development of disease in himself is used to diagnose cultural and historical diseases and their effects. For instance, Nietzsche claims that the fact that he is the first "accomplished nihilist" gives him particular insight into the state of development of European nihilism.[21] Similarly, in the second *Untimely Meditation,* where he embarks in an analysis of the nature of the historical illness of modernity, Nietzsche claims that he drew on "experiences" and "tormenting feelings" that "were mostly" his "*own*."[22] Thus, the diagnosis of the ailments of a culture or a time is often the outcome of a diagnosis of symptoms and processes that Nietzsche observes in himself;[23] he seems to believe that, by experimentally offering himself to disease as his own "laboratory animal,"[24] he can acquire a deep and unique type of knowledge about sickness, its causes, effects, symptoms and unfolding — know it from the inside, as it were.

In the preface to the second edition of the *Gay Science*, Nietzsche finds in what he then calls "psychology" this vocation for the examination of symptoms in different aspects of individuals, cultures, and epochs. The "psychologist," as a diagnostician, will examine thought as an expression or product of states of health of sickness.[25] As Foucault states in 1966, for Nietzsche the philosopher was the one who could "provide a diagnosis of the state of thought" or "thinking."[26] Even "metaphysics," Nietzsche claims, can be analyzed

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[20] Cf. EH, 'Wise'; GS, 'Preface to the Second Edition' (from here onward, P).

[21] WP §3 (KSA 12:10 [192]).

[22] He adds that he has "drawn on the experiences of others only for purposes of comparison" (UM, 60). Foucault stresses the relation between Nietzsche's relation to history and that of our epoch (N, 47).

[23] N, 47.

[24] Stefan Zweig, *Nietzsche* (2020), 19.

[25] GS, P, 34.

[26] DE1, 581. In this, he echoes what he developed in his manuscript *Le Discours philosophique* (1966–1967), where he defines the task of philosophy, after Nietzsche, as that of *diagnosing*, that is, "recognizing" that "which is taking place [*ce qui se passe*]" in (and by means of) "sensible marks" (or "signs") (LDP, 13). To diagnose is to "state the difference," to articulate the "gap [*écart*]," the "deviation" that its "moment" represents

and described in this way, being "valuable for the historian and psychologist as hints and symptoms of the body, of its success or failure, its plenitude, power [. . .] or its frustrations, weariness, impoverishments."[27] Probing the unfolding of sickness is essential. One can say that there is, in Nietzsche's work, a curiosity that is almost cold, positivistic, for the description and understanding of illnesses, for pursuing with the objectivity of a doctor the experiences and potential developments these diseases propose. He writes that, should the "psychologist" become ill, "he will bring all of his scientific curiosity into his illness."[28] This experience is marked by the will to acquire wisdom, to gain a deeper knowledge about life, produced in the very experience of illness.

If there is a transversal question in Nieztsche's thought, in the different moments of its development, it is perhaps precisely this preoccupation with the specific dynamics of disease, its internal modalities of development, its secrets, its different masks. It is the possibility of understanding these modalities of development in their unavoidable *negativity* – in what they destroy, damage, frustrate — but also in what they make possible, the possibilities of transformation that they open.

Moreover, Nietzsche's key concern regarding the question of disease also expresses his effort to think about, or establish, the conditions of health, convalescence and, ultimately, of the affirmation of life through a process that presupposes both health and disease.[29] Thus, he writes, "being sick" — for someone predisposed to health — can become "an energetic *stimulus* for life, for living *more*."[30] The very process of sickness, of falling ill and recovering, plays a key role in his experimental definitions of health.[31] In this sense, he writes, "for a psychologist there are few questions that are as attractive as that concerning the relation of health and philosophy."[32]

In the exploration of this question, the coldness of the diagnostician meets the passion and the renewed gaze of the convalescent. Nietzsche speaks of an "*intoxication* of convalescence" experienced by a "spirit who has patiently resisted a terrible, long pressure [. . .] severely, coldly."[33] As he relates in *Ecce Homo*: "I took myself by hand, I made myself healthy again: the condition for this [. . .] is *that one be healthy at bottom* [. . .]. This, in fact, is how that long period of sickness appears to me *now*: as it were, I discovered life anew,

(LDP, 252); the philosophical act of "diagnosing the present" is also an "immanent" or "internal ethnology of our culture" (DE1, 626; Irrera and Lorenzini, "Situation," in LDP, 284). The Nietzschean inspiration of this task is clear in the sense that Nietzsche's philosophical inquiry on culture and history propose an examination of the singularity of the present (cf. DE1, 634), in its conditions of sickness and potential for health.

[27] GS, P, 35.

[28] GS, P, 33.

[29] Cf. GS, §382, EH, 'Zarathustra,' 2.

[30] EH, 'Wise,' 2.

[31] On the experimental and dynamic dimension of health, see Ure and Testa, "Foucault and Nietzsche"; Keith Ansell-Pearson, "'We Are Experiments': Nietzsche, Foucault, and Passion of Knowledge" (2018); Federico Testa, *On the Politics of the Living* (2025).

[32] GS, P, 33.

[33] GS, 32.

including myself [. . .] – I turned will to health, to *life*, into a philosophy."[34] There is, in Nietzsche's philosophy, that which André Gide wrote of his own work *Les nourritures terrestres:* a "lyricism" of someone "who embraces life as something he risked losing."[35] Nietzsche's words are those of a "convalescent, of someone who has been ill."[36]

However, the notions of disease and health are not for Nietzsche univocal descriptions, statistical averages, or essential typologies, but polymorphous and polyvalent concepts. Thus, rather than defining the essence of sickness, Nietzsche invites us to embrace the ambiguity and relativity of these concepts, as well as to affirm the displacements and shifts in *perspective* they make possible.[37] Health and sickness are not, therefore, fixed categories, but something one *exercises,* exploits, and transforms.[38] They constitute something one can actively *employ* as *epistemic* and *evaluative* viewpoints, which one can adopt to examine one's time, oneself, but also the moral, cultural, and historical inventions among which one lives. This enhanced possibility of knowledge, the different aspects of things known, revealed, or made visible in sickness, and this possibility of evaluation of practices and ideas from the viewpoint of illness, is what Nietzsche seems to be referring to when he speaks of the "profits" and "advantages" the philosopher can take from "severe sickness."[39]

In this variation of perspectives, I see an affirmative and performative exercise (of knowing and evaluating from the viewpoint of health or sickness, "traversing many kinds of health"[40]), a "dramatics," generated in the multiple displacements between illness and convalescence, which produces what Gilles Deleuze named a "secret intersubjectivity" within the same individual.[41] Nietzsche, therefore, thinks he is a sick man, or "decadent," but also its "opposite."[42] As he writes in *Ecce Homo*, the exercise consists in

> Looking from the perspective of the sick toward *healthier* concepts and values and, conversely, looking again from the fullness and self-assurance of a *rich* life into the secret work of the instinct of decadence – in this I have had the longest training, my truest experience; if anything, I became [a] master in *this*. Now [. . .] I have the

[34] EH, 'Wise,' 2.
[35] André Gide, *Les nourritures terrestres* (1984), 11; my translation. In Dorothy Bussy's version, "In the very flights of its poetry there is the exuberance of someone to whom life is precious because he has been on the point of losing it" (André Gide, *Fruits of the Earth,* trans. Dorothy Bussy [1970], 11).
[36] Gide, *Les nourritures terrestres*, 11.
[37] I find Gilles Deleuze's (*Nietzsche* [1965]) description of the mobility in perspectives opened by experiences of health and sickness particularly insightful. I also agree with Andrew Huddleston when he writes that "health and sickness, for Nietzsche, exist in a complex interplay" (Andrew Huddleston, "Nietzsche on the Health of the Soul" [2016], 139). However, as I specify below, this is fundamentally linked to an analysis of potentialities *internal* to disease.
[38] EH, 'Wise,' 2.
[39] GS, P, 35.
[40] Ibid.
[41] Deleuze, *Nietzsche*, 9.
[42] EH, 'Wise,' 2.

> know-how, to *reverse perspectives*: the first reason why a 'revaluation of values' is perhaps possible for me alone.[43]

Thus, Nietzsche cultivates a mobility, a capacity for occupying different perspectives of experience and evaluation. He plunges into illness in order to gain knowledge of its particular and unique dynamics. But he uses the episodes of illness as an occasion to practice an exercise of the gaze, that is, to look with critical distance, strangeness, and curiosity at what previously was, or appeared to him until then, as familiar, close, normal, or healthy.[44] We note that, for Nietzsche, health and sickness constitute evaluative or axiological standpoints, from which he looks at different phenomena. The pair 'health-sickness' often serves as an index for Nietzsche's own evaluations of individuals, epochs, and cultures:[45] Socrates,[46] Epicurus,[47] the Germans,[48] Christianity, the ascetic drive,[49] or the historical sense, among others. In short, it serves as a conceptual orientation in his examination of values, and allows him to evaluate ways of life, and to diagnose modalities of flourishing, as well as moments of decay and impoverishment of life.

As we have seen, Nietzsche construes his philosophy as an effort toward convalescence — an exercise of multiple convalescences, which presupposes the experience of sickness. To fall ill is a "luxury," as Canguilhem wrote in *The Normal and the Pathological*, a "temptation,"[50] necessary to the exercise of what Nietzsche calls the "great health"— "that one does not merely have but also acquires continually, and must acquire because one gives it up again and again, and must give it up."[51]

This "will to health" — which Foucault stresses in the Vincennes lectures — animates Nietzsche's thought, and appears clearly in the images of philosophy he proposes, in particular in the 'middle period,' as an art of cures, treatments, and medicines and their appropriate doses; or, as Keith Ansell-Pearson highlights, drawing on *Dawn* §462 and §534, respectively, an art of "slow cures" and "small doses."[52] This medical concern, in particular with a certain art of remedies, which Foucault calls "pharmacopeia,"[53] is clearly

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[43] EH, 'Wise,' 1.

[44] In Deleuze's view, health consists precisely in this mobility and capacity to change perspectives; Nietzsche only really collapsed into infirmity when he lost that capacity.

[45] In this, I agree with Andrew Huddleston ("Nietzsche on the Health of the Soul") on the notion that Nietzsche's discussion of health presupposes normative concepts. It remains to be seen what is the particular form that this normativity acquires in the context of Nietzsche's thought on health and disease.

[46] See BT §12–20, 23, 24; GS §36, 328, 340; TI, II, §1–12.

[47] For a detailed overview, see Federico Testa, "Nietzsche and Guyau on the Temporality of Epicurean Pleasure" (2020).

[48] See, for example, TI, VIII, §1–7, among others.

[49] For example, GM, III.

[50] Canguilhem, *The Normal and the Pathological* (1989), 199–200.

[51] GS § 382.

[52] Keith Ansell-Pearson, "Afterword of the Editor," in D, 366; see also his *Nietzsche's Search for Philosophy* (2018), 10, 54.

[53] N, 27.

linked to the reflections on history and on historical and historiographic practices in *The Wanderer and His Shadow*, where Nietzsche presents an idea of history as pharmacology.[54]

I would now like to explore the relation between this idea of philosophy as something akin to medicine (as a diagnostic practice and a curative art), on the one hand, and a certain experience of history in modernity, on the other.

ON REMEDIES AND PHILOSOPHICAL MEDICINE

Was I ill? Have I got well?
Who was my doctor? Can you tell?[55]

In his work, Nietzsche also proposes a critical examination of philosophical therapeutics, as well as of the remedies and medicines proposed by philosophy, having for example, experienced in himself, his life, his body, the detrimental and sometimes toxic effects of philosophical therapies, particularly in their Hellenistic iteration.[56] In this endeavor, he follows the idea formulated in *Schopenhauer as Educator*, according to which "the only critique of a philosophy that is possible and that proves something" consists in "trying to see whether one can live in accordance with it."[57] However, in making himself his own laboratory, Nietzsche comes to note not only the insufficiency of ancient therapies, but also their potentially detrimental effects.[58] As Thomas Ryan and Michael Ure show, Nietzsche observes the failure of the philosophical therapies of the Stoics, Epicureans, and Skeptics: "Nietzsche's gambit is to conceive these schools as failed therapies that exacerbate the illnesses they purport to cure. Rather than correctly diagnosing psychological and physiological disorders, Nietzsche argues, classical and Hellenistic philosophies misunderstand them."[59] Moreover, "he implies that the classical and Hellenistic philosophies are in fact symptoms of the illnesses" they seek to cure.[60]

Thus, the history of the attempts at administering cures is also a history of intoxication and poisoning. As Nietzsche writes in *Dawn*, "the human being's greatest disease grew out of the battle against its diseases, and the apparent remedies have, in the long run,

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[54] WS §188.

[55] GS, 'Joke, Cunning, and Revenge. Prelude in German Rhymes,' §4, 41.

[56] Marta Faustino has discussed this in detail in "Nietzsche's Therapy of Therapy" (2017). See also Michael Ure, *Nietzsche's Therapy: Self-Cultivation in the Middle Works* (2008).

[57] UM, 187.

[58] Thomas Ryan and Michael Ure, "Nieztsche's Post-Classical Therapy" (2014); Faustino, "Nietzsche's Therapy of Therapy."

[59] Ryan and Ure, "Nieztsche Post-Classical Therapy." In this regard, their analysis follows Bernard William's idea according to which "we are surely bound to find the Epicureans too rationalistic, the Sceptics too procedurally self-obsessed, the Stoics (at least in their Roman incarnation) too unyieldingly pompous for us to take entirely seriously, not just their therapies, but the idea of them as philosophical therapists" ("Do Not Disturb" [1994]).

[60] Ryan and Ure, "Nietzsche's Post-Classical Therapy," 95, 94.

produced something worse than what they were supposed to eliminate."[61] He continues claiming that only "out of ignorance one mistook the momentarily effective, anesthetizing, and intoxicating means, the so-called consolations, for the actual remedies, indeed it wasn't even noticed that one had to pay for these immediate alleviations with a general and profound worsening of the ailment, that the invalids had to suffer from the aftereffects of intoxication . . ."[62]

In any case, in addition to the fundamental task of diagnosing our epochal illnesses, Nietzsche also seems to want to identify, within these illnesses, a thread of development that would be able to conduct us to healing. Thus, if the image of medicine occupies a central position in his work, it is not only because of its diagnostic role, but also because it is capable of operating healing.[63] In this context, Nietzsche underscores the need for "philosophical physicians," a theme unfolding from his early notebooks, where he depicts the "philosopher as the physician of culture."[64] Yet he does not seem to find the philosophical physicians he looks for. In *Schopenhauer as Educator*, he writes: "in times when physicians are required the most, in times of great plagues, they are also most in peril," and asks: "[W]here are the physicians for modern mankind who themselves stand so firmly and soundly on their feet that they are able to support others and lead them by the hand?"[65] Similarly, in *Dawn* §52, he asks: "*Where are the new physicians of the soul?*" — "where is the one who, at long last, will also take seriously the antidotes to this suffering and expose publicly the scandalous quackery with which [. . .] humanity has treated its diseases of the soul?" Later, in *The Gay Science,* he writes: "I am still waiting for a philosophical *physician* in the exceptional sense of the word."[66] We can thus see that the figure of the physician — philosophical, of culture, of the soul — and the theme of the medical nature of philosophy recur in Nietzsche's writings.

Foucault does not neglect this transversal aspect Nietzsche's work that accompanies the reflection on health and disease. In the celebrated text published in 1971 as a tribute to Jean Hyppolite, "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History," Foucault remarks that the "historical sense," presented as constitutive of genealogy, is "much closer to medicine than to philosophy, 'historically and physiologically', Nietzsche says."[67] Genealogy must be, therefore, a "differential knowledge of the energies and failings, heights and degenerations, poisons and antidotes."[68] Quoting *The Wanderer and His Shadow* §188, Foucault tells us

[61] D §52.
[62] Ibid.
[63] See Michael Ure, "Nietzsche's Political Therapy" (2013); Faustino, "Nietzsche's Therapy of Therapy."
[64] WEN, 167 (*Nachlass* 1872/1873, 23[15]), 186 (*Nachlass* 1873/1874 30[8]). See also Faustino, "Nietzsche's Therapy of Therapy," 90–91; Ure and Testa, "Foucault and Nietzsche."
[65] UM, 133. Later, he writes: "How it stands with our own age in regard to health and sickness – who is sufficient of a physician to know that!" (UM, 174).
[66] GS, P, 2, 35.
[67] FR, 90; DE1, 1017; TI, IX, §44.
[68] FR, 90; DE1, 1017.

that genealogy must be a "curative science" or a "science of remedies [*remèdes*]."[69] Genealogy, or *wirkliche Historie*, is exercised in a gaze (*regard*) similar to that of the doctor "who looks closely, who plunges to make a diagnosis and to state [the] difference" of "what is closest."[70]

Nevertheless, even recognizing and adopting this double aspect of the Nietzschean conception of genealogy as a medical practice, Foucault consistently emphasizes the importance of diagnosis. By contrast, in the published texts, he devotes less attention to the idea of genealogy as a curative science (or a science of remedies).[71] This is not surprising since Foucault was not fundamentally concerned about finding "solutions"; rather, he sought to apply himself to a work of "problematization and perpetual re-problematization."[72] From this viewpoint, one is not surprised to find in Foucault a hesitation regarding the possible solutions proposed by Nietzsche — if there are indeed solutions in his work — or, at least, a tendency not to attribute so much importance to the search for remedies. Moreover, as we have seen, for Nietzsche, the notions of health and illness are dynamic and situational, such that what is a remedy today can easily function as a poison tomorrow or in other contexts. However, if in "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History" this curative aspect of genealogy is only referred to in passing, in the 1969–1970 lectures at Vincennes we can find important elements to understand this aspect of the genealogical concern in Foucault, and its discreet presence in the 1971 text (which Annexes 1, 2, and 3 of the *Nietzsche* volume help us better appreciate).[73]

In my view, this question of the "curative" aspect of genealogy is fundamental, albeit not in order to build a new philosophical therapy for the present, especially one based on 'answers' and 'solutions'[74] — which would risk offering us consolations, weakening our will, or poisoning us in more serious ways in an attempt to deny disease, or prevent its unfolding. Rather, in a Nietzschean spirit, this theme of the curative or medicinal dimension of genealogy can serve as a productive context of inquiry on the effects of genealogy as a practice or as an exercise and a modality of interrogation of the present. To think of history as a possible science of remedies does not mean to construe it as a science of solutions and answers, of pacification or totalization, or of improvement and reconciliation.[75] History, in

[69] FR 90, for the phrase "curative science," which translates the French "*science des remèdes*" (DE1, 1017).
[70] FR, 89–90; DE1, 1017. Note the use of the French expression "*dire la différence*" the same that appears in LDP, 252.
[71] In *Le Discours Philosophique*, Foucault speaks of the task of philosophy "today" as one of "establishing a *diagnosis* that would not be an interpretation and which would not have a therapeutics as its end" (LDP, 16). In this context, Foucault states that if the philosopher is still a "physician of culture," his mission is, nevertheless, not connected to healing" (LDP, 16).
[72] DE2, 1431.
[73] N, 81–94; 95–102; 103–106.
[74] For an alternative view on Foucault's critique of philosophical therapy within the context of an analysis of the notion of diagnosis, see Daniele Lorenzini, "What Does It Mean to Diagnose the Present? Archaeology and Genealogy in Michel Foucault" (forthcoming).
[75] LDP, 16; N, 47.

this sense, does not aim at achieving good or quiescent conscience. It is, rather, an analysis of illnesses and an exercise concerned with the conditions of health, one thereby capable of opening a space for the deployment of a will to health. What is at stake is thinking of genealogy "at the service of life," to quote the second of the *Untimely Meditations*, that is, as a modality of the use of history "for the sake of life and action, not so as to turn comfortably away from life and action."[76]

I would like to analyze the ambiguity of the "historical sense" as it appears in Foucault's 1969–1970 Vincennes lectures, focusing on its possible ambivalence regarding the problem of *disease*. My aim is to examine the role that this historical sense plays both in the definition of the disease that marks 'our' present, and as a singular and recent event that introduces discontinuity in the present and establishes our own difference in history. Furthermore, I would like to ask whether the historical sense also appears, in Foucault's reading of Nietzsche, as a *healing* power, as one of the medicines for the disease it causes.

FOUCAULT ON THE "HISTORICAL SENSE" AND GENEALOGY

In the first lecture of the Vincennes course, Foucault proposes an analysis of the "problem of historical knowledge."[77] He identifies the "historical sense," a term that appears in the second *Untimely*, as an organizing category in Nietzsche's thought. This constitutes one of the defining aspects of his interpretation, as Foucault links the totality of Nietzsche's work to this notion.[78]

But what is this "historical sense"? For Foucault, it is "the differential element of modern Europe."[79] In the second *Untimely*, Nietzsche announces his attempt to "look afresh at something of which our time is rightly proud – its cultivation of history – as being injurious to it, a defect and deficiency in it; because [. . .] we are all suffering from a consuming fever of history and ought at least to recognize that we are suffering from it."[80]

Why is this cultivation of history — this *culture historique* — a sign of disease? In order to answer this question, one must bear in mind the ambivalence that surrounds experiences of illness, which I pointed out above. As Nietzsche writes, paraphrasing Goethe, by cultivating *virtues*, we at the same time cultivate *vices*, which would lead us to think that a "hypertrophied virtue – such as the historical sense of our age" can ruin an individual or a people "just as effectively as a hypertrophied vice."[81] The overdevelopment of a quality, its wrong dosage, can produce effects that are detrimental to life. In this case, Nietzsche

[76] UM, 59.
[77] N, 18.
[78] "The main texts dedicated to the *historical sense* [are] *Human All Too Human*, §272–294; 'The Wanderer and His Shadow', §188; *Dawn*, §307; *Gay Science*, §337; *Beyond Good and Evil*, §223–224; *The Genealogy of Morals*, III, §25" (N, 22–23).
[79] N, 23.
[80] UM, 60.
[81] UM, 60. On the virtues of history and, in particular, "historical philosophy," see HH, 1.

explains, in a process that is itself historical, the "historical sense" becomes hypertrophied, paralyzing us and shattering us under the weight of historical memory, thus dissolving the *non-historical* horizon of life, that is, the non-historical "ambiance" that must envelop human life so that it can flourish. According to Nietzsche,

> [O]nly by imposing limits on this unhistorical element by thinking, reflecting, comparing, distinguishing, drawing conclusions, only through [. . .] employing the past for the purposes of life [. . .] did man become man: but with an excess of history man again ceases to exist, and without that envelope of the unhistorical he would never have begun or dared to begin.[82]

If "forgetting is essential to action of any kind" and if "it is altogether impossible to live at all without forgetting,"[83] our epoch, according to Nietzsche, finds itself in a state of paralysis, precisely because we have lost the "ability to forget,"[84] fundamental in the experience of happiness:

> A human being may well ask an animal: 'Why do you not speak to me of your happiness but only stand and gaze at me?' The animal would like to answer, and say: 'The reason is I always forget what I was going to say' – but then he forgot this answer too, and stayed silent: so that the human being was left wondering.[85]

However, Foucault explains, this animal (*tierisch*) existence cannot be an ideal for human beings, for they need history in order to live.[86] The historical perspective, Nietzsche writes, allows us to assimilate and incorporate the past, to transform it into a sort of "blood" that fortifies and nourishes the present.[87]

According to Foucault, the development of a historical science (*Wissenschaft*) dissolves the unhistorical, breaking the fragile equilibrium it entertained with the historical. This faculty that helped us assimilate the past in a productive fashion becomes hypertrophied and crushes us with the weight of historical memory and remembrance. Whence the five harmful consequences underlined by Foucault in the first lecture:[88]

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[82] UM, 63–64.
[83] UM, 62.
[84] Ibid.
[85] "But with an excess of history man again ceases to exist, and without that envelope of the unhistorical he would never have begun or dared to begin. What deed would man be capable of if he had not first entered into that vaporous region of the unhistorical?" (UM, 64). Or: "To take everything objectively, to grow angry at nothing, to love nothing, to understand everything, how soft and pliable that makes one" (UM, 105). See also UM, 60–61.
[86] N, 18.
[87] "[I]t would [. . .] incorporate into itself all the past, its own and that most foreign to it, and [. . .] transform it into blood. That which such a nature cannot subdue it knows how to forget" (UM, 63).
[88] N, 18.

(1) The "weakening of individuality";[89]
(2) The "illusion of justice"[90] (which recalls the reflections of the young Nietzsche on tragedy and poetic justice);[91]
(3) The "destruction" of the space of "illusion" that is a fundamental condition for action;[92]
(4) The "belief in the achievement or completion [*achèvement*] of the world," that is, the idea that history has reached its end, its culmination, that becoming has arrived at its term; and, finally,
(5) "Skepticism" – in Nietzsche's words: "a man who did not possess the power of forgetting at all and who was thus condemned to see everywhere a state of becoming [. . .] would no longer *believe* in his own being, would no longer believe in himself, would see everything flowing asunder in moving points and would lose himself in this stream of becoming."[93]

The diagnosis is thus sketched: we are sick with history, crushed by the weight of a past we are no longer capable of integrating, due to our lack of strength, by *souvenirs* that destroy the atmosphere of forgetfulness that must nurture our life. The historical sense necessary for a healthy life capable of finding nourishment in the past and unfolding into action in the present has *degenerated* into something else. The exaggeration of our science has paralyzed us, and now leads us to doubt our own existence. The dose and level of development of our historical 'virtue' has become fatal; for, in Nietzsche's words, "*there is a degree of sleeplessness, of rumination, of the historical sense, which is harmful and ultimately fatal to the living thing, whether this living thing be a man or a people or a culture*."[94]

Nevertheless, in his lecture, after articulating Nietzsche's diagnosis, Foucault does not follow the order of development of the second *Untimely*; he does not proceed to an exposition of the text showing how Nietzsche seeks to solve the problems generated by the historical sense (which could have led him to a discussion of the "plastic power" that must be cultivated in our relationship to the past, or of the notion of "history as a work of art," capable of sustaining the ambiance needed for the strengthening of life).[95] Foucault choses

[89] UM, 62.
[90] "Historical justice, even when it is genuine and practiced with the purest of intentions, is therefore a dreadful virtue because it always undermines the living thing and brings it down: its judgment is always annihilating" (UM, 95).
[91] Here, history, or the unfolding of becoming would amount to the accomplishment of pacification, reconciliation, retribution, closure—the development of time would culminate with punishment or reward for the hero according to his merit or, in a word, poetic justice. Cf. KGW, III [2], 7–57.
[92] "When the historical sense reigns without restraint, and all its consequences
[are] realized, it uproots the future because it destroys illusions and robs the things that exist of the atmosphere in which alone they can live" (UM, 95).
[93] UM, 62; my emphasis. For a view highlighting the virtues of skepticism, see Lorenzo Serini, "Nietzsche's Conception of Skepticism" (2024).
[94] UM, 62.
[95] On the notion of "plastic power," see UM, 62, 77, 120; on history as art, see UM, 95, 120.

a different path, asking instead: "[F]rom where does the historical sense come from, and how is it formed"?[96] This will lead him to the study of other moments of Nietzsche's works, as well as to the attempt of composing a "history of history."[97]

A crucial element of this history of the emergence of historical sense is the decadent character of 'our' culture and ourselves, which I call 'historical cosmopolitanism' (made possible by our 'hybrid' nature). I believe that the analysis of this element illustrates the constitutive ambiguity of the historical sense in Foucault's 1969–1970 lectures and, consequently, speaks to the medical aspects of genealogy I highlighted above.

Reading *Beyond Good and Evil*, Foucault claims that, for Nietzsche, recognizing other cultures is a sign of "barbarism." The barbarians at the gates of the Roman Empire recognized Roman civilization as foreign (*étrangère*): "they apprehended differences, because they were rejected, outside."[98] We are also capable of recognizing the difference of other cultures vis-à-vis our own, and we are therefore "semi-barbarians" ourselves.[99] But our barbarism is of a different kind. We recognize historical alterity or difference not only outside ourselves, but "we find it" above all "within ourselves."[100] Why? Because we are what Nietzsche calls *Mischmensch*[101] — we are *mélangés*, mixed and composed of "foreign and strange fragments."[102] We are the result of singular encounters of different lines of contingent historical development, of different classes, provenances, races; we are products gathering together extinct ways of life and cultural systems. As Nietzsche explains:

> [The] historical sense to which we Europeans lay claim as our specialty has come to us in the wake of that enchanting and mad *semi-barbarism* into which Europe had been plunged by the democratic mingling of classes and races: only the nineteenth century knows this sense, as its sixth sense. The past of every form and way of life, of cultures that formerly lay right next to each other or one on top of the other, now flows into us 'modern souls', thanks to this mixture: our instincts now run back everywhere; we ourselves are a kind of chaos.[103]

In short, we are formed of historical alterities and multiplicities that escape us, but which we desire to know. Studying history, therefore, is a means to acquire knowledge of the fragments that compose us; but it also means to fragment and disperse ourselves, and thus to perceive that which Foucault calls, in one of the *fiches* quoted by Bernard Harcourt in the critical apparatus, our "historically multiple self."[104]

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[96] N, 24.

[97] Ibid. As he will later write in "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History": "Through this historical sense, knowledge is allowed to create its own genealogy in the act of cognition; and *wirkliche Historie* composes a genealogy of history as the vertical projection of its position" (FR, 90).

[98] Foucault's French reads "*ils étaient rejetés au dehors*" (N, 25).

[99] BGE §224.

[100] N, 25.

[101] Translated as "men-of-mixture" (FR, 92).

[102] Or "*morceaux étranges et étrangers*" (N, 25).

[103] BGE §224.

[104] The original reads "*moi historiquement multiple*."

Moreover, 'we' are also the product of "democratic confusion," we want to "know" these fragments "one by one in the most neutral way possible."[105] We are thus predisposed to develop a certain *ascetic virtue*, which tends to grow in the direction of auto-suppression and self-effacement of the subject in the fundamentally "plebeian" study of history.[106] At the same time, this condition of constitutive multiplicity and chaos of cultures, ways of life, and provenances that constitute ourselves also produces in us a willingness or desire of identification.[107] Foucault explains that "the *Mischmensch* of the 19th century seeks an identity. He searches for it in all these identities of which he is the mixture. His historical tastes [. . .] are desires of identification."[108]

In light of this reconstruction, Foucault asks, "how could this fragile germen [*germe*] of the historical sense, this symptom of our disease, be protected and turned into its opposite?"[109] Foucault calls a first answer to this question the "parody of masks," which consists in turning the effort of identification into a "game," not in order to "reconstruct an identity that would be found in the exterior," but to extract "from ourselves all these identities, and to wear" them — to bear, to carry them[110] — "not as truths, but as masks."[111] Here, against the illness of immobilizing fixation on the accumulation of the past, "one detaches oneself from what one worships and affirms oneself" in one's constitutive variety and multiplicity.[112]

Furthermore, as Foucault emphasizes, in *Beyond Good and Evil* §224, Nietzsche tells us that, if we are a product of admixture, of *mélange* and chaos, we have for this very reason "secret access" everywhere in history, we are cosmopolitan citizens of history for whom the essentialist idea of an original purity does not make sense. As Nietzsche writes: "Through our semi-barbarism in body and desires we have secret access in all directions, as no noble age ever did; above all, access to the labyrinths of unfinished cultures and to every semi-barbarism that ever existed on earth."[113] For Foucault, this has four important consequences, which genealogy will seek to develop:

(1) The first consequence is that the study of history transforms us — "not only our spirit but our heart."[114] What is at stake here is introducing, within oneself,

[105] N, 25.
[106] N, 40. Cf. BGE §223. In 1971, Foucault writes: "What is the source of history? It comes from the plebs. To whom is it addressed? To the plebs" (FR, 91).
[107] In BGE §223, Nietzsche writes: "The hybrid European – all in all, a tolerably ugly plebeian – simply needs a costume: he requires history as a storage room for costumes. To be sure, he soon notices that not one fits him very well; so he keeps changing."
[108] N, 26.
[109] Foucault's French reads "*retourné en son contraire*" (N, 26).
[110] Foucault's French is *porter*. I have chosen the English 'to wear' as it relates to the idea of the mask, as well as the metaphor of the costume Nietzsche uses in BGE §223.
[111] N, 26–27.
[112] N, 44.
[113] BGE §224.
[114] HH II §22.

the *discontinuity, rupture*, *chance*, and *randomness* (*l'aléatoire*) which characterize becoming.[115]

(2) The second consequence is that we can turn history, as Nietzsche pointed out in *The Wanderer and His Shadow* §188, into "pharmacology"; we can do this by asking *where* and *when* in time we can place ourselves through historical study so that we can produce effects upon ourselves.

(3) Moreover, we can make of our "historically multiple self" a laboratory of experiments, or to quote Nietzsche's words in *The Gay Science,* highlighted by Foucault, "live adventurously."[116] After writing the history of "all that gives color to existence," an "experimentation would be in order that allows every kind of heroism to find satisfaction."[117]

(4) The fourth and final consequence of this 'cosmopolitanism' of historical sense is that it opens our eyes to things that are close to us, and leads us to look closely at the *present*;[118] that is, it leads us to perceive and experience time from the optic of singularity and dispersion, against the unity and continuity of memory and totalization. In this sense, Foucault highlights the power of the historical sense as a critique of metaphysics through what, in *Human All Too Human,* Nietzsche calls "historical philosophy,"[119] which is opposed to the Platonic "Egypticism" of ideas and essences.[120] The Vincennes lectures thus sketch what will reappear in "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History," where Foucault writes: "the historical sense can evade metaphysics and become a privileged instrument of genealogy if it refuses the certainty of absolutes."[121]

By considering these consequences, we begin to see how, in Foucault's reading, the historical sense is not only an epochal disease, but also opens a territory for genealogy as a modality of writing history as well as a way of using history to produce effects — for genealogy as a critical attitude.

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[115] As later in "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History," the different genealogical declinations of the problem of origin (*Entstehung, Herkunft*), plunge our historical being in the universe of force relations, of domination and of violent interpretations and appropriations (DE2, 1008–1014; cf. N, 67; 74–76).

[116] GS §7.

[117] Ibid.

[118] This reappears in "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History" (FR, 89).

[119] "Everything, however, has come to be; there are *no eternal facts*: just as there are no absolute truths. – From now on therefore, *historical philosophizing* will be necessary, and along with it the virtue of modesty" (see HH, 1, §2).

[120] "You ask me which of the philosophers' traits are really idiosyncrasies [. . .]. For example, their lack of an historical sense, their hatred of the very idea of becoming, their Egypticism. They think that they show their respect for a thing when they dehistoricize it, *sub specie aeterni* – when they turn it into a mummy. All that philosophers have handled for thousands of years have been concept-mummies" (TI, III, §1).

[121] FR, 87.

HISTORICAL SENSE AS *DISEASE AND REMEDY*

Foucault's construal of the historical sense in his 1969–1970 lectures could be characterized as a sort of *pharmakon*: it is both the poisonous excess of history — and as such, the symptom or expression of a disease — but one that also carries with it the possibility of a new health. This logic clearly appears in Foucault's analysis of *Gay Science* §337, where the historical sense is construed both as "virtue" (*Tugend*) and as "disease" (*Krankheit*). As Nietzsche writes: "When I contemplate the present age with the eyes of some remote age, I can find nothing more remarkable in present-day humanity than its *distinctive virtue* [*Tugend*] and disease [*Krankheit*], which goes by the name of 'the historical sense'. This is the beginning of something altogether new and strange in history."[122]

For Foucault, *Gay Science* §337 is a crucial passage, bringing together different elements of Nietzsche's philosophy in a unique way.[123] He emphasizes Nietzsche's attention to the "present-day" (in his rendering, the *instant*) as characterized by a historical sense that is essentially ambiguous: both *virtue* and *disease*. In the passage, Foucault explains, *Tugend* conveys "two senses of the word 'virtue': it is the property, the internal force, the specific power" of something; but "it is also the contrary of vice"; *Tugend* is, thus, both "ascetic and specific virtue."[124]

In this idea of virtue, we find an important variation of the theme of the ambiguity of the historical sense. As an ascetic virtue, the historical sense emerged in the history of modernity as a "historical attitude" and an approach to the study of history, but also as a feeling (*Gefühl*) and a new sensibility, and thus as an attitude toward existence nourished by them, consisting of a "suppression of [. . .] all individual position," of an "obliteration [*anéantissement*] of the subject" and an "effacement of the body."[125] Indeed, this "ascetic virtue [is] the symptom of a disease" which has two aspects: "the weakening of a culture that recognizes other cultures" (as we have seen in Foucault's reading of *Beyond Good and Evil* §224) and the "mixture of individuals," who in modern Europe are "*Mischmensch*."[126]

However, the virtue Nietzsche highlights in the passage is also the *distinctive* virtue found in the historical sense as disease. In Foucault's view, this leads to a "circularity": "the historical sense is the symptom of a disease (that is ascesis, *Tugend*)"[127] but "this disease develops a historical sense that is its specific virtue (*Tugend*)," which according to Foucault is related to a certain practice of knowledge.[128] To medicate oneself [*prendre le remède*] one must "make of one's own existence a tool to know history."[129] "This disease," he explains,

[122] GS §337.
[123] N, 39.
[124] N, 43.
[125] Ibid.
[126] N, 43–44.
[127] Marked by "objectivism, nihilism, asceticism" (N, 48).
[128] N, 44.
[129] N, 27.

"has three stages that are both illness and healing [*guérison*]": (1) a detachment of what one "worships" and an "affirmation of self"; (2) a life that is lived "experimentally," guided by the "will to have health, the effort to imitate it," to "offer oneself to adventure";[130] (3) an "opening [of] one's eyes to what is near," to the present in particular.[131]

In the third lecture, Foucault discusses another figure of GS §337, that of the grief-stricken "hero of the evening" who "welcomes a new dawn" (in Foucault's words, "the hero of the morning").[132] The man of the historical sense experiences "the history of humanity as a whole *as his own*"[133] and feels the "grief of an invalid who thinks of health, of an old man who thinks of the dreams of his youth, of a lover deprived of his beloved, of the martyr whose idea is perishing, of the hero of the evening after a battle that has decided nothing but brought him wounds and the loss of his friend."[134] Yet this is not the full picture, as the wounded hero, if he "could endure this immense grief of all kinds," could become "the hero who, as the second day of battle breaks, welcomes the dawn, and his fortune."[135] Condensing history in himself, "the oldest, the newest, losses, hopes, conquests, and the victories of humanity" into "a single feeling," he would be fully present to the instant when the battle recommences, and would experience a "happiness that humanity has not known so far," a "fragile" and "nascent" joy.[136] In Foucault's reading, the historical sense is thus both "evening and dawn, end [*achèvement*] and recommencement, remembrance and the promise of struggle."[137]

We can see how the very sensibility and form of *connaissance* that produced grief and exhaustion can also lead, as a "specific virtue," to an emerging and fragile happiness. But for this to happen, one must actively protect (*proteger*) the historical sense against "the asceticism-impotence of the first historians" and "against the totality-compassion of the last men."[138] To escape these two poles, the historical sense must "deepen [*approfondir*] this *instant* in which it is born"; not "abstain from nihilism, from this illness, from the suffering which have brought it about, and against which it is the only cure [*la seule guérison*]. The historical sense must remain near the *fissure* that has originated it" and "keep open the *scission*."[139]

There are two elements I would like to highlight in this process where illness is overturned and — by the affirmation of the difference it introduces — is itself turned into a process of healing. First, the idea of the immanent development that, from within the

[130] Foucault's phrase is "*à titre d'expérience*" (N, 44).
[131] N, 47.
[132] N, 53–54.
[133] GS §337.
[134] Ibid.
[135] Ibid.
[136] GS §337.
[137] N, 54.
[138] Ibid. Foucault here shows how Nietzsche's main targets are the historians such as Dühring and philosophers such as Hegel and Schopenhauer, respectively.
[139] N, 58.

core of disease, opens up new possibilities of existence, overcoming the very state of disease, transmuting it. Second, a certain interpretation of genealogy that Foucault's reading makes possible by his emphasis on the notion of virtue (*Tugend*).

With regard to the first element, following a logic that often appears in Nietzsche's analyses of *décadence*, degeneration, nihilism, and disease,[140] Foucault seeks to extract the conditions of healing and transformation from the process and the affirmation of illness itself. In establishing the historical sense as a singular event in modern European history, Foucault seeks to think within the epochal horizon of experience it inaugurates — not denying this horizon but affirming it, seeking to understand it and allowing becoming to unfold, seeking to reverse it from within. This immanent mode of transfiguration and critique is clearly expressed by Nietzsche in the *Twilight of the Idols*:

> What we did not know before, what we know today [. . .] – a *regression*, an about-turn of any kind or to any extent, is just not possible. At least we physiologists know this. But all the priests and moralists have believed it is – they *wanted* to bring humanity, *crank* humanity back to an earlier measure of virtue [. . .]. It is no use: we have to go forwards, i.e. *step by step further in* décadence (–this being *my* definition of modern 'progress' . . .). You can check this development and, by checking it, dam up, accumulate degeneration itself, making it more vehement and sudden: no more can be done.[141]

Similarly, one could say that Foucault seeks to advance, to move forward in the historical sense, to allow it to produce *differentiating* effects. As in the case of *décadence* or of nihilism, it is the affirmation of the belonging to the universe of the historical sense, the lucid and active acceleration of its *specific* dynamics, the accomplishment of its development in us that allow to affirm, also, the virtually *transformative* aspects of the illness generated by the historical sense. In this, the historical sense is an *experiment*.[142]

Foucault sheds light upon this analogy or continuity between the dynamic of the historical sense and the logic of nihilism: "In the depths of the nihilist winter of the modern world, a light announces itself at the edge of the sky [. . .]. [W]hat nihilism brings to us [*nous rapporte*] is the thought of becoming [*la pensée du devenir*]."[143] This pale and cold light is perhaps a new thought of becoming, *genealogy*, which emerges from the very process of the modern historical disease, as the immanent critique of the historical sense diagnosed by Nietzsche. In this sense, Foucault seems to be situating genealogy within the depiction

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[140] HH §224. In a fragment from March–June 1888, Nietzsche writes: "The concept of *décadence* – Waste [*Abfall*], decay [*Verfall*], elimination [*Ausschuss*] need not be condemned: they are necessary consequences of life, of the growth of life. The phenomenon of decadence is as necessary as any increase and advance of life: one is in no position to abolish it" (WP §40; KSA 13:14 [75]).

[141] TI, IX, §43.

[142] "What will become of thought itself when subjected to the *pressure* of sickness?" (GS, P, 34).

[143] N, 50.

of modernity proposed by Nietzsche: a potential mutation of the science of history and of the way of *being historical* of the moderns. Genealogy is thus the innovative effect of the diseased logic of excessive historical sense, simultaneously its extension and transfiguration into a "knowledge [*savoir*] of the eternal recommencement of random multiplicities," capable of articulating "an *épistémè* of the uncertain [or random, *aléatoire*], of the probable and the improbable, of chance, and game [*jeu*]."[144]

Therefore, on the one hand, the question of cure initially seems to be a question of *quantity*, of the *amount* of historical sense one should inoculate — or a question of *doses*: How much history will be lethal and crush us under the paralyzing weight of memory? How much history is needed in order to reach that which is "close to us" — the "instant" that is always in the process of "starting again." However, in my view, the question is also about the *qualitative* relationships one can have to history: How should one use, employ, or deploy the historical sense in order to develop the tendencies that it makes possible? Which type of practice of history is *virtuous*? Which sort should one avoid?

Secondly, what is at stake is not simply an intensification of the historical sense, but the affirmation of its "virtue," which one can read as the *virtuous* affirmation of its specificity, of the power, dispositions, and attitudes it makes possible. As Foucault's reflections (especially on GS §337) show, if the historical sense is to be drawn upon to heal the present, it will demand cultivation and protection against uses that we could call *vicious* (such as "the universality-compassion of absolute knowledge" and "the infertile [*asexué*] objectivity of science").[145] What Foucault sees as worthy of cultivation are the aspects of the historical sense that can bring joy, openness to multiplicity and action in the present, as well as "to the individual singularity of events."[146] In this sense, *Tugend* is not merely a distinctive trait of the historical sense, but also a set of epistemic and ethical (or attitudinal) dispositions one must cultivate to intensify life and bring about cure (*guérison*). In this sense, I find it interesting that in GS §337 Nietzsche does not speak explicitly of *virtue* and *vice*, but rather of *virtue* and *sickness*. Healing, here, seems to be equated with the process of cultivation of virtue understood, as Georges Canguilhem writes, "in the old sense of the word, which blends virtue, power and function."[147] This interpretation leads us back to the concern with which Nietzsche started his reflection on the historical sense in the second *Untimely*, namely the relationship between virtue and vice.[148]

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[144] N, 75.

[145] N, 58.

[146] Ibid. Another aspect, which I cannot develop here, is the "critique of domination" (N, 75).

[147] Georges Canguilhem, *The Normal and the Pathological* (1989), 169.

[148] UM, 60. For a discussion of Nietzsche's work from the viewpoint of an ethics of virtues see Mark Alfano, "The Most Agreeable of All Vices: Nietzsche as Virtue Epistemologist" (2013); Serini, "Nietzsche's Conception of Skepticism"; among others.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

One may consider genealogy as a spiritual practice[149] — a form of knowledge whose practice produces radical transformations upon the structure of the subject.[150] Following the logic of the Vincennes lectures, this would presuppose the cultivation of specific epistemic and attitudinal elements of the historical sense. In this sense, genealogy would incorporate the historical sense, not in its raw state, but rather under the transfigured form of a virtue — simultaneously an epistemic and existential disposition — which would entail a transformed relation to history, to the present, and to the instant. Thus, not only would genealogy be a form of knowledge; it would also be an exercise of opening to the present, to its aleatory singularity, viewing history as something always in the process of recommencing in the instant.

As Foucault shows in his detailed analysis of GS §337, genealogy appears as a possible curative art, that is, a transmutation of the weight of historical accumulation into the joy of recommencing in action. Conceived in this way, it seems that genealogy is able to satisfy Goethe's demand with which Nietzsche started the second of the *Untimely Meditations*, namely that of instructing, augmenting, and "directly invigorating activity."[151] If the historical disease is above all impossibility of acting, creating, and engaging in processes of experimentation, genealogy, turning the historical sense into the "knowledge of the eternal recommencing of aleatory multiplicities,"[152] appears as a medical knowledge, which invites us to action and to take part in the joy of acting. It shows us, as Foucault argues, that "everything is a beginning" and that "every instant is absolutely new."[153]

Acknowledgments

I am grateful to Orazio Irrera and Bernard E. Harcourt for inviting me to speak at the event "Le(s) Nietzsche de Foucault" (EHESS, Columbia University, Paris 8, 2024) in the context of which I presented an earlier version of this paper. I am indebted to Michael Ure, Keith Ansell-Pearson, and Lorenzo Serini for inspiring conversations on different themes central to this text, and to Niki Kasumi Clements for encouragement. I am also grateful to Daniele Lorenzini for his careful reading and helpful comments.

[149] Cf. Michael Ure, "Foucault's Reinvention of Philosophy as a Way of Life" (2020). For a different perspective, see Daniele Lorenzini, "Nietzsche's Genealogical Perfectionism" (2024).
[150] HS, 25–42.
[151] UM, 59.
[152] In the original: "*Le sens historique, c'est le savoir du recommencement des multiplicités aléatoires*" (N, 76).
[153] N, 76.

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Works by Nietzsche

I use the following abbreviations to cite Nietzsche's work (I refer to sections and/or aphorisms using the symbol §):

BGE = *Beyond Good and Evil*, trans. W. Kaufmann. New York: Vintage Books, 1966.
D = *Dawn*, trans. B. Smith, ed. K. Ansell-Pearson. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2011.
EH = *Ecce Homo*, trans. W. Kaufmann. New York: Vintage Books, 1967.
GM = *On the Genealogy of Morals*, trans. W. Kaufmann. New York: Vintage Books, 1967.
GS = *The Gay Science*, trans. W. Kaufmann. New York: Vintage Books, 1971.
HH = *Human, All Too Human I*, trans. G. Handwerk. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995.
KSA = *Kritische Studienausgabe*, ed. G. Colli and M. Montinari. Berlin: de Gruyter, 1967.
TI = *Twilight of the Idols*, trans. D. Large. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017.
UM = *Untimely Meditations,* trans. R. J. Hollingdale, ed. D. Breazeale. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997.
WEN = *Writings from the Early Notebooks,* trans. L. Löb, ed. R. Geuss and A. Nehamas. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009.
WP = *The Will to Power,* trans. W. Kaufmann and R. J. Hollingdale, ed. W. Kaufmann. New York: Vintage Books, 1967.
WS = "The Wanderer and His Shadow," in *Human All Too Human II, and Unpublished Fragments from the Period of* Human All Too Human II *(Spring 1878–Fall 1879)*, trans. and ed. G. Handwerk. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2013, 145–296.

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CT = *The Courage of the Truth (The Government of Self and Others II): Lectures at the Collège de France, 1983–1984*, ed. F. Gros, trans. G. Burchell. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011.
DE1 = *Dits et écrits I, 1954–1975*, ed. D. Defert and F. Ewald. Paris: Gallimard, 2001.
DE2 = *Dits et écrits II, 1976–1988*, ed. D. Defert and F. Ewald. Paris: Gallimard, 2001.
EW1 = *Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth*, Vol. 1 of *The Essential Works of Foucault, 1954–1984*, ed. P. Rabinow, trans. R. Hurley and others. London: Penguin, 2000.
EW2 = *Aesthetics: Method and Epistemology*, Vol. 2 of *The Essential Works of Foucault, 1954–1984*, ed. J. D. Faubion, trans. R. Hurley and others. London: Penguin, 2000.
EW3 = *Power*, Vol. 3 of *The Essential Works of Foucault, 1954–1984*, ed. J. D. Faubion, trans. R. Hurley and others. London: Penguin, 2002.
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FR = *The Foucault Reader*, ed. P. Rabinow. London: Penguin, 1991.
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HS = *The Hermeneutics of the Subject: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1981–1982*, ed. F. Gros, trans. G. Burchell. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005.
LDP = *Le Discours philosophique*, ed. O. Irrera and D. Lorenzini. Paris: Seuil/Gallimard/EHESS, 2023.

LWK = *Lectures on the Will to Know: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1970–1971 & Oedipal Knowledge*, ed. D. Defert, trans. G. Burchell. New York: Picador, 2014.

N = *Nietzsche: Cours, conférences et travaux*, ed. B. E. Harcourt. Paris: Seuil/Gallimard/EHESS, 2024.

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