

How to Think with Nietzsche's Genealogy: Will to Power versus Will to Survival (Life)

كيف نفكر مع نيتشه جينيالوجيا: إرادة القوة ضد إرادة البقاء (الحياة)

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Abstract:

This study aims to direct thought toward a critical reevaluation of all inherited ideas, thereby reinforcing a critical approach that recognizes no authoritarian tutelage. Nietzsche stands among the philosophers who succeeded in advancing the wheel of criticism toward broad horizons. Through his genealogical method, he created a profound resonance at the core of philosophical thought, where he replaced the ordinary human (the weak) with the Superman via the principle of the will to power, positioning the latter as the product of his philosophy—a philosophy capable of overturning all values to prioritize strength over weakness and substituting the irrational for reason.

Keywords: Genealogy; philology; will to power; will to survival; the higher man.

ملخص:

تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى توجيه الفكر نحو إعادة نظر نقدية في جميع الأفكار الموروثة، مُعززةً بذلك أسلوباً نقدياً لا يعترف بأي وصاية سلطوية، إذ يُعدّ نيتشه من الفلاسفة الذين نجحوا في دفع عجلة النقد نحو آفاقٍ رحبة، إذ أحدث من خلال منهجه الجينيالوجي صدىً عميقاً في صميم الفكر الفلسفي، حيث استبدل من خلال مبدأ إرادة القوة الإنسان العادي (الضعيف) بالإنسان السوبرمان، واضعاً هذا الأخير

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نتاجاً لفلسفته - فلسفة قادرة على قلب جميع القيم لترجيح القوة على الضعف، وإحلال اللاعقلاني محل العقل.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الجينياولوجيا؛ الفيلولوجيا؛ إرادة القوة؛ إرادة البقاء؛ الإنسان الأعلى.

1. Introduction:

With the philosopher Nietzsche (1844–1900), the ledger of grand philosophies and metanarratives was closed in favor of new problems that might be recognized on the intellectual-philosophical stage as hollow pretenses bearing no relation to genuine philosophical inquiry—yet they destabilized order, ushered in chaos, undermined reason, and sowed the seeds of renaissance by welcoming a new consciousness that interrogates tradition and deconstructs it, which was the task of philosophers who, in their practice, critiqued the edifice of the greatest philosophies built over decades; In this same context, Nietzsche's philosophy emerged as a form of demolition, unlike Descartes, who doubted tradition while presupposing some form of truth, or Leibniz, who asserted that inherited tradition contained a share of truth, Nietzsche executed a total and comprehensive destruction, declaring the absence of truth and redirecting thought toward examining reality's concrete issues, free from metaphysical speculation.

He first announced his critique of Christianity in *The Antichrist*, then turned to philosophy in *Twilight of the Idols*, and finally to morality in *On the Genealogy of Morals*, which he regarded as a self-sufficient philosophy precisely because it overturned prevailing norms, raising the following questions:

How might we think with Nietzsche?

2. Reading of Nietzsche's an attempt to overturn all values:

Western philosophical thought had long excluded ethics from critique, focusing instead on epistemology and ontology as its pillars, yet Nietzsche integrated ethics into his genealogical practice, not as an attempt to reinterpret it but to dismantle the moral system entirely, fully aware that this excluded and forbidden domain demanded reexamination, as by coupling genealogy with philology, he forged a critical framework to expose the dubious validity and credibility of moral theories, a point he reiterated across his works to declare the end of the "center" or, as Paul Ricoeur termed it, "grand narratives". Today, critique has become the tool of all sciences, philosophy in particular, and ethics can no longer be exempt—indeed, Nietzsche deemed it the project most in need of demolition and reconstruction, where Nietzsche's critical approach subjected modernity's central concepts

to rigorous scrutiny, sifting philosophical meanings to reveal the fallacies underpinning its grand doctrines, which inaugurated a new form of philosophical critique—unlike Kant’s (1724–1804) reason-critiquing-reason or Descartes’ doubt (sparing religious knowledge), as Nietzsche’s radicalism rejected all bias and foundational paradigms, insisting that critique must begin from the principle of non-partisanship.

The history of philosophical thought has, throughout its stages, established numerous ethical-philosophical doctrines, with Greek society standing out as the most philosophically engaged in presenting models of practical life intertwined with morality; indeed, the Greeks were unaware of any separation between ethics, politics, and even aesthetics, where the ethical idea was, par excellence, an aesthetic one, as most doctrines of this era remain foundational references for subsequent philosophies and theories, all treating morality as an imperative governed by universal principles, however for Nietzsche, this (Greek) tradition, except the Sophists, played a decisive role in reducing the origin of values to the search for a governing standard to judge human actions, a consensus-based framework that the Greek school systematized into measurable norms, thereby codifying societal conduct as “moral rules”.

Delving into the origins of these values is no simple task, neither methodologically nor intellectually, for this project, as noted earlier, is rooted in problematic philosophical frameworks that have solidified into authoritative traditions; compounded by morality’s inherent entanglement with aesthetics and politics, the inquiry becomes profoundly complex; here, the subject dictates the method, as over time, ethics ceased to be questioned, shifting from its ties to politics and beauty to theology, resulting in what Nietzsche called “theological theories” masquerading as philosophy.

From this emerges the morality of weakness that Nietzsche sought to interrogate—a nihilistic morality that deifies reason while disregarding lived reality; there is but one objective, manifested through multiple agents: to weaken the capacity for refusal, confrontation, and critique. As he asserts in his seminal work: “Modern man has been corrupted and seduced by malignant institutions (tyrants—priests); reason enthroned as authority; history glossing over errors; the future worshipped as progress; the Christian state

as shepherd of peoples; sexual instinct (or marriage, in other words); the sovereignty of justice (the cult of humanity) " (Nietzsche, 2011/n.d., p. 44).

Through this reference, Nietzsche alludes to the forms of decadence and nihilism upon which values have been established—what he terms "nihilistic values"—, for Nietzsche, all these forms are ultimately reduced to the undermining of thought and the absence of any readiness for revolution against all that preceded; the reason for this lies in the obfuscation of the masses, in the use of religion as opium, politics as authority, and reason as a centralizing force; in this way, modern man has lost his intrinsic value—namely, the capacity to determine his destiny independently of such powers, therefore, Nietzsche's idea is not to merely address the prevailing condition, but to destroy it and reconstruct it on entirely new foundations, ones grounded in the power of reason.

Nietzsche affirms in *Twilight of the Idols*: "Reason is the cause that compels us to falsify the testimony of the senses; yet so long as the senses continue to reveal becoming, decay, and transformation, they do not lie" (Nietzsche, 1889/2010, p. 37).

Nietzsche's adoption of genealogy as a tool to critique tradition was not merely strategic but necessary, for critique alone had become insufficient; what was needed was a critique of critique—his central task being to expose the European illusion of an objectively derived heritage, when in reality, it was merely an accumulation of foreign constructs classified as "European tradition", which raises the question: What references shaped Nietzsche's critical thought?

3. Thinking with Nietzsche:

Engaging philosophically with Nietzsche through a critical lens reflects all critical philosophies in philosophical history; his critique is resolute and rigorous, rejecting the existence of any fragment of absolute truth—instead, he acknowledges interpretation as sovereign, as there exists no truth compelling belief or conformity, nor does he employ the same tools he deconstructs (unlike Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*, which critiques reason through reason); neither does he admit ideology-infused truths like Leibniz, nor evade sensitive subjects as Descartes (1596–1650) did to avoid contradicting religious circles; here, Nietzsche can only be paralleled with Spinoza (1632–1677), whose scathing critique of religious institutions in the *Theologico-Political Treatise* mirrors Nietzsche's revolt—though Spinoza focused on mechanisms of intellectual obfuscation rather than religion and religious sentiment.

Through his genealogical method, Nietzsche reassesses philosophy's history beginning with Plato, targeting narratives constructed and aggregated as self-sustaining philosophical theories—those historically classified as pinnacles of philosophical consciousness, where his genealogy concentrates on Judeo-Christian thought while praising pre-existing materialist philosophies. Like Hegel (1770–1831), Nietzsche pursues what might be termed pure consciousness; yet he diverges fundamentally, as Hegel sought to uncover truth through a historical philosophy propelled by “Absolute Spirit”—a consciousness transcending itself—though Hegel pioneered framing Greek society as the first civilization formulating theories through autonomous consciousness, free from external authority. Nietzsche opposes Hegel in principle and orientation (the latter being an idealist immersed in rationalism), yet concurs regarding truth-seeking mechanisms and the formative role of conflict in consciousness, this being central to Nietzsche's project of genealogy. What, then, is genealogy? Etymologically, “genealogy” (from *genea* [race] and *logos* [study]) denotes the science of lineage or descent; some trace its roots to *genos* (origin) and *logos*, with common usage signifying the study of ancestry (Marif, 2021, p. 44).

Genealogy constitutes Nietzsche's instrument—or hammer—through which he deconstructs concepts and dismantles grand narratives along with metaphysical philosophies predicated on notions of perfection/the absolute; thus, genealogy emerges as radical critique at the conceptual root, confronting every transcendental philosophy that seeks to affirm reason's authority and its capacity for revelation, inquiry, and critique, where the Nietzschean critique, as previously noted, differs fundamentally from the Kantian model—the latter having fallen into the trap of rationalism despite Kant himself being among the few philosophers who recognized that preceding rationalist doctrines had overburdened reason by casting it as an absolute witness to all human knowledge; Yet by adopting critique of reason by reason, Kant confined himself within transcendental metaphysical thought, insofar as he believed in its realization within his Critique of Practical Reason. Consequently, genealogy serves as a horizon for resuming thought beyond the orbit of conventional metaphysical presuppositions (Belkafif, 2014, p. 121).

Genealogical critique must not be understood as a return to foundationalism, but rather as demolition and reconstruction; coupling genealogy with philology enables the

inquiry into origins to exercise criticism—particularly concerning the genealogist's verification of conceptual lineage (*nasaba*), where philosopher Gilles Deleuze observes in *Nietzsche and Philosophy*: "Nietzsche constitutes the concept of the genealogist—the philosopher is a genealogist... and genealogy signifies both the value of origin and the origin of values simultaneously" (Deleuze, 1993, pp. 6-7).

The coupling of genealogy with philological inquiry enabled it to assume new dimensions—or rather, clarified genealogy's value through investigating conceptual origins; since Nietzsche's primary focus centered on the realm of values, all his endeavors were directed toward tracing the formation of moral concepts; here, Nietzsche's "return" must not be misconstrued as akin to philosophers' returns aimed at reviving or restoring heritage: it constitutes a distinct return—neither embracing Cartesian doubt nor mirroring Husserl's (1859–1938) phenomenological return "to the things themselves" to let them reveal themselves—but rather a return for the sake of critiquing critique itself, which is understood as beyond mere destabilization; Nietzsche's term is shattering, through which we shall elucidate what his genealogical critique exposes, beginning with the word "good" (*tayyib*): "As for the word good (*bonus* in Latin), which originally denoted the warrior: its earliest form *duonus* reveals *bonus* as epitomizing the man of combat and the sword (*l'homme du duel*)—the quarrelsome (*duo*), that is, the fighter—which captures the essence of goodness in ancient Rome" (Sharqi et al., n.d, p. 60).

Such genealogical treatment of the term "good" reveals Nietzsche's formidable capacity for tracing the term's lineage and exposing the ideology behind its deliberate alteration and conceptual manipulation; as Nietzsche illustrates, every one of us now perceives "goodness" as denoting a peaceful, weak individual—thereby associating goodness with altruistic and pity-based relationships upon which the weak rely, directing their behavior toward benevolent treatment of others, whereas the true origin of this term, as our philosopher clarifies, belongs to the courageous man who establishes his status through strength, valor, and distinction from the collective—the exceptional individual surpassing the herd, which reflects critique's potency; further, thinker Mourad Quassemi observes in his work on Nietzschean genealogy regarding another term: "The notion of the divine (*gottliche Der*)—that is, a person descended from divine lineage, synonymous with *Lgoth*, which denotes a people—was originally but a designation for a category of nobles" (Sharqi et al., n.d, p. 60).

Through the foregoing, we arrive at the notion that Nietzschean consciousness necessitates the application of critique and the refusal to submit to any authority deemed unquestionable dogma; thus, the framework presented by the philosopher Nietzsche destabilized the very Western foundation upon which any consciousness priding itself on possessing a philosophical history, based on Western civilizational heritage, rests; for when he specifically ventured into the realm of values, he was acutely aware that this unspoken domain carried a burden of dubious truth and validity; moreover, he discerned the formation of Western consciousness itself, recognizing that prevailing morality is a construct of the weak, the defeated, and the deprived, as indicated in his work “The Transvaluation of All Values”; consequently, his genealogical revolution exposed the pretensions of absolute centers, absolute corollaries, and transcendent philosophies proclaiming the absolute, alongside all claims heralding Christianity as a peaceful religion; indeed, this critique rendered the sacred (Christianity) profane, and the authority of reason a fabrication by the weak to justify their frailty and resistance to change; collectively, these endeavors fostered a cohort of strong, superior individuals opposed to participation.

This genealogical approach summons free consciousness and instigates a revolutionary renaissance against the equality that Christianity sought to expand and propagate, and which civil institutions worked to activate; for the Antichrist stands opposed to any entity evading genealogical critique, particularly every theory, philosophy, or doctrine claiming immunity from criticism; thereby, Nietzsche’s treatment of the realm of values emerged after philosophers throughout history had positioned it as a domain beyond accountability and critique. “It follows from genealogy that values are neither divine in origin nor rational in genesis; they are neither neutral, universal, nor transcendent, but purely products of contention among active forces; consequently, they must not be excluded from the sphere of critique under the pretext of neutrality, objectivity, or sacredness, for all such claims are untenable from the genealogical perspective”(Al-Sunun, 2021, pp. 88-89).

The will to power that Nietzsche sought to activate stands opposed to free will; for the realization of master morality necessitates revolution against slave morality, which has entrenched all forms of nihilism, countering reason with unreason and substituting chaos for order; since every harmonious system serves centralized authority, it is futile to think within

systematic frameworks that have assumed new forms of nihilism; indeed, the observer of Nietzsche's ideas and studies cannot define his specific orientation or philosophy, for it is a philosophy founded upon total repudiation—as all preceding philosophies possess their premises, whether systematic, rationalistic, scientific, religious, or otherwise; even the references he commended in establishing his thought were subjected to his critique for failing to maintain their foundational principles, which had originally shaped his philosophical conceptions.

Nietzsche's aspiration was the realization of the *Übermensch*—the radically superior individual—in whom the condition of equality finds no place, thereby exalting the notion of survival for the strongest who create self-determined morals beyond religious, racial, or ideological influences; throughout his works, Nietzsche urged the activation of the will to power and the repudiation of slave morality by stimulating revolutionary impetus against the weak to catalyze the renaissance of the strong; it must not be inferred from our philosopher's thought that his idea of survival denotes ontological preservation as a trait; rather, it signifies psychological survival that elevates the individual to self-transcending distinction from others in society; therefore, to think with Nietzsche reinforces methods of genealogical critique, founded on rejecting prefabricated theories and dogmas constructed upon doctrines claiming objectivity; for every act of refusal establishes a new consciousness toward a more critical philosophy.

4. The Philosophical Framework of Nietzsche's Will to Power Principle:

The foundational premise upon which Nietzsche constructed his philosophy—a premise that dismantled numerous philosophical doctrines—was the principle of the will to power, formulated in opposition to the slave morality (herd mentality) and all forms of nihilism, passivity, and aversion to confrontation, as this principle stands as the most radical and formidable in his oeuvre, as it seeks to negate all preceding wills that he deemed submissive or subjugated to external authorities—whether rational, Christian, or technological—each epoch having imposed its dominance through a distinct paradigm.

The will to power did not emerge in a vacuum but was built upon pivotal references in the history of human thought, as although Nietzsche himself rarely acknowledged intellectual debts, even when he did, he ultimately subjected them to critique, as the scholar engaged in philosophical and scientific inquiry must meticulously trace these influences, discerning their interplay and divergences, because the will to power, as a principle, was not wholly original

to Nietzsche; in *Human, All Too Human*, he acknowledges his early admiration for Schopenhauer (1788–1860), whom he called his “first educator,” particularly regarding two notions: the will to live and the denial of reason as the world’s governing principle; initially, Nietzsche praised Schopenhauer’s departure from rationalist dogma, yet the latter’s eventual embrace of Christianity provoked Nietzsche’s revolt, exposing what he saw as a contradiction: Schopenhauer’s philosophical project began by affirming the will to live but culminated in a theological negation of it.

A second, equally decisive reference for the will to power was Charles Darwin’s (1809–1882) seminal work, *On the Origin of Species*, a transformative text in scientific and intellectual history, where Darwin’s theory disrupted entrenched scientific paradigms, catalyzing a secular shift in Western thought by displacing theological explanations with naturalistic ones—transitioning from divine mythos to scientific logos, from hyper-rationality to the irrational, from order to chaos, as Faisal Abbas notes: “Darwinism contributed to the rise of a new secular Europe... Western conceptions of human nature underwent profound changes under Darwin’s influence, as the irrationality of human nature—its instincts and destructive aggression—became urgent concerns in philosophical discourse” (Abbas, 1996, p. 262).

The central idea that served as the impetus for Nietzsche’s concept of the will to power was formulated by Darwin in his seminal work—namely, the struggle for existence, based on the premise that life proceeds according to fundamental conditions: “the survival of the fittest and what nature demands”, however, nature enforces the law of natural selection among living beings, meaning it operates under a single principle: “survival is contingent upon death”—an equation where the fittest endure at the expense of others.

As an illustration of natural selection elucidating Darwin’s theory: in the deep ocean, thousands of fish coexist, varying in size, strength, and speed; among these species, what is termed the “struggle for existence” unfolds, manifesting when one is driven by hunger; as in the vast ocean, we encounter the blue whale, renowned for its colossal size and considered the largest creature on Earth, pitted in a fierce confrontation against the orca—the latter distinguished by its strength, speed, intelligence, and resilience in battle; Here, the question arises: when applying the theory of natural selection, who will prevail and endure in the

ocean? Those unacquainted with the marine world might hastily conclude that the blue whale, given its size and power, reigns supreme; Yet, contrary to expectation, it is the orca that succeeds, owing to its innate physical adaptations, coupled with its exceptional ability to locate its opponent; thus, what ensures the orca's success is its strategy of hunting in coordinated groups, studying its prey's weaknesses before launching an attack, and demonstrating remarkable endurance during confrontations. The orca prevails against numerous marine predators, such as the great white shark and the sperm whale; thus, nature enacts natural selection, the cornerstone of which, according to Darwin, is the struggle for existence. (Darwin, 1859/2017, p. 207)

Thus, nature—unlike man—does not aim at focusing on transformation per se, but rather at preserving the transformations of one being in accordance with another; herein lies Nietzsche's starting point regarding the idea of struggle for existence as a framework for substantiating his concept of the will to power; as is well known, Nietzsche leaves no theory immune to critique and scrutiny, thus, the theory of natural selection became subject to critical contention, where Darwin's primary concern in his work was to uncover the fundamental stages through which man passes in his genesis, considering the stage of "man" as the final one—contrary to Nietzsche, who rejects this trajectory and proposes his idea of the *Übermensch* (Overman), which emerges after man and represents a higher stage of existence.

On another part, Darwin's notion of the struggle for existence is, in fact, unacceptable to Nietzsche, as while he was influenced by Darwin's theory and even employed certain evolutionary terms, Nietzsche nevertheless regards Darwin's idea of the struggle for existence as somewhat reductive, where he positions himself as an opponent of Darwinism, replacing the struggle for existence with the power struggle: "For him, the conflict revolves not around mere survival but around the assertion of dominance and potency" (Abdel Salam Ali Jaafar, 1999, p. 203).

The approach Darwin employed to elucidate his evolutionary theory remains applicable in non-human domains, yet fails to address human consciousness; it represents a paradigm catering to humanity's primitive inclinations, whereas the superior man contends not for mere existence but for power, as Nietzsche effectively subverted the natural selection theory – that biologically-grounded principle confining man to his primordial stages – by fundamentally reorienting its premises.

While Nietzsche acknowledges the innate aggression and conflict Darwin articulated in his theory, his stance toward natural selection proves uncompromising; far from ensuring the survival of the fittest, he posits it guarantees the demise of the strong. Nietzsche advances a more cogent argument aligned with his *Übermensch* (Superman) concept: man evolves not through ontological determinism – through nature-granted brute strength – but through psychological refinement and volitional superiority that elevates him above his peers; this *Übermensch* emerges from self-directed cultivation, distinguished by traits that radically differentiate him from the collective; Consequently, Nietzsche's philosophy rests not on ontological but psychological foundations: "The will to dominate and endure constitute inherent psychological states in man; thus his doctrine builds not upon metaphysical premises but upon psychic dynamics" (Zaroukhi Draji & Saifi Fairuz, 2019, p. 28).

Nietzsche's foundational critique, aimed at activating the will to power as the will to struggle for existence, fundamentally undermines all other philosophical conceptions of volition: Schopenhauer's will to live, Darwin's ontological will of nature, and Kant's autonomous will, each standing as an obstacle to genuine transformation and progress. While Darwin's theory at least contributed to uprooting Christianity by shifting perspectives from the transcendent to the immanent world, Nietzsche's will to power emerges as the essential principle through which he sought to critique European nihilism, particularly targeting its three decadent manifestations (religion, morality, philosophy).

5. Conclusion:

To think alongside Nietzsche demands that the philosophical researcher adopt a genealogical stance toward all their presuppositions, for the true value of critique is realized only through such an approach, where Nietzsche's endeavors—evident across his works—constitute a call to reject any perspective that asserts its authority, grounded in the belief that philosophical inquiry is not merely about crafting concepts, but rather about tracing them back to their origins through a genealogical method.

Despite the objections that have fueled strong resistance to the Nietzschean approach—particularly its rigorous application of genealogy—it has nonetheless opened crucial new horizons for philosophical critique by venturing into all domains of thought and

transcending preconceived judgments, which often stand as fundamental obstacles to critical engagement, while Nietzsche's method has redefined the boundaries of inquiry.

In this regard, the Nietzschean vision has not only enriched philosophical studies but has also extended its influence to other disciplines, demonstrating that the investigative approach championed by Nietzsche lays the foundation for a new era—one that is open to exploration across all frontiers.

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