

FOUCAULT'S READING OF NIETZSCHE

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We propose to start from a less-known text of Michel Foucault, a lecture given at the Royaumont Colloquy from July 1964, entitled *Nietzsche, Freud, Marx*. The text, along with the comments of some of the members of the audience, was published in *Cahiers de Royaumont* (Colloque de Royaumont, juillet 1964), t. VI, Paris, Éd. de Minuit, 1967, pp. 183-200, and republished, some decades later, in the large two volume collection of Foucauldian texts, which had not appeared in Foucault's edited volumes: *Dits et Écrits*, Gallimard, coll. Quarto, 2001 (t. I, texte no. 46, pp. 592-607). Among the members of the audience who commented on Foucault's lecture there were names well-known in that period, Jean Wahl, Jacob Taubes and others who later became well-known, such as G. Vattimo.

The title of Foucault's lecture (and the theme of the entire colloquium of July 1964) recalls a formulation frequently invoked by Paul Ricoeur¹, according to whom, Marx, Nietzsche and Freud are the three «*maîtres du soupçon*», a formulation which is quite ambiguous in French. This coincidence isn't, to be sure, accidental: it is a proof that in the '60s a complex vision on *late modernity* had already been sketched (although, this term, proposed by A. Giddens in 1960 and taken over initially mainly by sociologists, such as Scott Lash and Ulrich Beck, and then reinterpreted by Z. Bauman under the concept of *liquid modernity*, appears subsequently in the debates arising from within French philosophy and so at that time did not have any suggestion of the idea of the postmodern), because it was Marx, Nietzsche and Freud who made the transition towards a new vision of man, towards a new philosophical anthropology, centered upon a redefinition of finitude, of rationality, of the epistemic subject, of history, far removed from the modernity's linearity which we can call a *classical* one. This *late modernity*, auto-reflexive, has as a philosophical infrastructure (and here Ricoeur, and, as we will see, Foucault are, obviously, right) the hermeneutic mechanisms (an author, from this epoch, speaks ironically of the "hermeneutic machinery (*la machine herméneutique*)", which implies, as a first stage, this difficult translation of *soupçon* about which Ricoeur wrote, which is not the policeman's *suspicion* (as in a *crime movie*, which relies on a simplified dialectics, but which cannot have the certainty of betrayal, nor the one who is

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¹ Paul Ricoeur, *De l'interprétation, Essai sur Freud*, Éditions du Seuil, Paris, 1965.

not guilty, as is Proust's Swann (or as in a Camil Petrescu's novel), but the feeling of (as Ricoeur would call it) *le cogito blessé* (the "harmed", maybe even "fractured", *cogito*) which defines the individual belonging to the *late modernity*. Even more, this *late modernity* radically questions the concept of *modernity* itself, and shows it to be fractured, contradictory, ideologically charged, maybe even, inoperable in terms of a contemporary philosophy of history.

But, first of all, in the sense which Foucault offers, *souççon* applies to language itself; according to him, the discovery belongs to the Greeks, who identify the difference between *allegory* and *hyponoia*, between (as we might translate it), an excess of sense and a deficit of language's sense, on the one hand (in the space between these two, it insinuates the *souççon*, the suspicion of incommunicability), and, on the other hand, the Idea (expressed, according to Foucault, by the Stoics in their concept of *semainon*) of a generalized communication which goes beyond the level of language.

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Foucault engages in his lecture at the Royaumont Colloquy with the long series of Nietzsche's interpreters, who were produced, almost without any continuity, by the French culture, beginning in the first years of the last century with the publication of the first translations of the work of Zarathustra's author. The most significant of these early first interpretations, remains, of course, the massive work of Charles Andler, *Nietzsche sa vie et sa pensée*, which has appeared after the First War and which, following the author's intention, was concerned to show a European Nietzsche, influenced by French culture and who could be opposed (along with Goethe, Beethoven et al.) to the barbarian and militarist Germany which invaded French some years earlier.

Andler was followed by other authors, generally possessing less accuracy, but (some) perhaps closer, such as Barrès, to Nietzsche's spirit.

After an episode of some years, during the War occupation, in which Nietzsche was appealed to, in the spirit of Bäumler² (the author of the book, *Nietzsche, der Philosoph und Politiker*, Ph. Reclam, 1937), in support of an Arian vision of European history and civilization³, Nietzsche recaptured, after the War, the attention of French philosophers through search for *authenticity* – which scared those ideologies which detest, using the contemptuous words Adorno applied to Heidegger, this "jargon of authenticity" (from his pamphlet 1964, entitled *Der Jargon der Eigentlichkeit*), but which is, however, the indelible badge applied by Nietzsche to contemporary philosophy. In this spirit, Foucault declared himself, in an interview, a partisan of "Nietzschean communism"⁴ (but, it must be said, his short political adventure as a member of PCF soon ended with a entirely predictable exclusion).

² See in this sense, Max Whyte, *The Uses and Abuses of Nietzsche in the Third Reich: Alfred Bäumler's «Heroic Realism»*, in *Journal of Contemporary History*, vol. 43 (2), 2008, pp. 171-194.

³ An ample review of the history of Nietzschean work reception, can be found at Massimo Ferrari Zumbini, *Nietzsche, storia di un processo politico. Dal nazismo alla globalizzazione*, Rubbettino Editore, coll. Saggi, 2011.

⁴ See also, Didier Eribon, *Michel Foucault*, Flammarion, Paris, 1991, p. 72.

Foucault approaches the three, Marx, Nietzsche and Freud, under the common category of the discovery of the infinitude (in both meanings of the term) of *interpretation*. Interpretation is, in all their work, infinite both as fundamental incompleteness, and as potentiality (Hegel would have spoken, here, of two infinities). Accordingly, the similarity of these authors, can be justified through the similitude of their *interpretation techniques*. Foucault proposes an interesting comparison with 17th century techniques of interpretation, sketching here what became, some years later, in *Les mots et les choses*, the theory of epistemes, those broad conceptual schemes which structured, according to Foucault, knowledge in distinct epochs.

Although filled with interesting suggestions and, as we have seen, anticipating some of the further developments in Foucault's work, the text from the Royaumont Colloquium gives, in a way, the impression that Marx, Nietzsche and Freud are identified more as a representing a borderline between epochs of knowledge and as a pretext for a vision of anthropology (at the confluence of structuralism and postmodernism), in which man appears as an ephemeral and transitory reality (as will be further explored in *Les mots et le choses*); the death of man is proclaimed as a far echo of a much-quoted formulae from Zarathustra, *Gott ist tot, God is dead* (a postmodern Nietzschean has reinterpreted this as: *God is dead. I want his job*).

This impression is encouraged by the fact that Foucault's text operates with almost none of the concepts he will later introduce in his work: episteme, genealogy, discursive and non-discursive practices, regimes of truth (the last one being, however, a concept barely suggested by Foucault⁵ and developed only later by authors such as Stephen Lukes and Lorna Weir).

This is why it is correct to argue that the relationship between Foucault and Nietzsche is essential for Foucault's further development, having in mind the fact that, many of the concepts of Foucauldian epistemology owe much of their substance to the Nietzschean perspective on truth,⁶ and that the whole philosophical project of Foucault, that ontology of actuality about which Foucault writes in one of his last texts,⁷ follows a philosophical path "from Hegel to the Frankfurt School, passing through Nietzsche and Max Weber, it constituted a form of reflection inside which I tried to work."⁸

An obvious example is that of the concept of *genealogy*, taken by Foucault from Nietzsche's writings and theorized in a much-cited text from 1971: *Nietzsche, la généalogie, l'histoire*. It is one of the most explicit texts written by Foucault regarding his relation with Nietzsche's thinking.

⁵ The term appears in a discussion/interview with A. Fontana and P. Pasquino; see Michel Foucault, *Dits et écrits*, II, 2001, pp. 158-159.

⁶ As Lorna Weir writes: "As many have noted (...), there is a Nietzschean cast to Foucault's work of the 1970s and 1980s that was absent from Bachelard or Canguilhem: truth is bloody rather than innocent, and genealogy the study of «the endlessly repeated play of dominations»" (Lorna Weir, *The Concept of Truth Regime*, in *Canadian Journal of Sociology*, 33 (2), 2008, p. 373).

⁷ Michel Foucault, *Qu'est-ce que les Lumières?*, in *Magazine littéraire*, no. 207, 1984, pp. 35-39, republished in Michel Foucault, *Dits et écrits II*, ed. cit., pp. 1498-1507.

⁸ Michel Foucault, *op. cit.*, p. 1507.

Not by chance, of course, *Nietzsche, la généalogie, l'histoire* appears in a volume dedicated to Jean Hyppolite (*Hommage à Jean Hyppolite*, Presses Universitaires de France, Paris, 1971). Jean Hyppolite, the eminent translator and commentator on Hegel's writings, was one of the professors Foucault felt closest to during his university studies. *Nietzsche, la généalogie, l'histoire* appears today as one of the founding texts of postmodernism in its French version (although, it must be said that Foucault detested this term⁹). The recourse to Nietzsche, from the beginning of the 1970s (or even earlier) is explained by Foucault as a personal reaction, of distancing himself from both Marxism, which dominated the French post-War intellectual circles, and from the structuralism which was presented at that time as a theoretical opposition towards the dominant Marxist dogmatism¹⁰.

Nietzsche, at this time, interested Foucault, mostly because of its connection with the problematics of the subject, being treated differently both from the reified Marxism, from the phenomenology of over-valorizing subjectivity, and from the structuralism which dissolves the subject into a network of formal relationships. In short, "Nietzsche was the point of rupture with the founding act of the subject"¹¹. Recognizing the role played by Deleuze's book, *Nietzsche et la Philosophie* (published at Presses Universitaires de France, Paris, 1962) in the renewed interest in nature, Foucault adds: "I gave courses on Nietzsche, but I have written much less on Nietzsche. The only homage, maybe too demonstrative (*un peu bruyant*) which I devoted to him was to entitle my first volume of the work *Histoire de la sexualité, La volonté de savoir*"¹². In quasi-identical terms, Foucault wrote to J.-J. Brochier regarding Nietzsche's influence: "Nowadays, I prefer to remain silent about Nietzsche. When I was teaching, I often gave courses on Nietzsche, but I wouldn't do that today. If I wanted to be pretentious, I would offer the genealogy of morals as the general title of what I am doing"¹³. Continuing, however, Foucault mentions his ideas regarding Nietzsche: "It was Nietzsche who specified the power relation as the general focus, shall we say, of philosophical discourse – whereas for Marx it was the production relation. Nietzsche is the philosopher who has moreover been able to think about power without having to confine himself within a political theory in order to do so"¹⁴. But regarding his fidelity to the Nietzschean ideas, Foucault admits in the same interview that: "The only valid tribute to thought such as Nietzsche's is precisely to use it, to deform it, to make it groan and protest"¹⁵.

⁹ During the ample discussion/interview with G. Raulet, which appears in *Telos*, vol. XVI, no. 55, from 1983, Foucault declares that «I cannot see to those called postmodern or post-structuralists which is their common problematics» (*Dits et écrits*, II, p. 1266).

¹⁰ *Ibidem*, pp. 1253 sq.

¹¹ The affirmation is of Gérard Raulet (*Ibidem*, p. 156) and it is approved with no reserves by Foucault.

¹² *Ibidem*, p. 1263.

¹³ Michel Foucault, *Entretien sur la prison: le livre et sa méthode* (interview with J.-J. Brochier, published in *Magazine littéraire*, no. 101, June 1975, pp. 27-33), reproduced in *Dits et écrits*, I, pp. 1608-1621.

¹⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 1621.

¹⁵ *Ibidem*.

With these words, Foucault highlights (or perhaps indirectly evokes) the most significant text devoted to Nietzsche, the previously mentioned, *Nietzsche, la généalogie, l'histoire*. In this text, Foucault analyses rigorously two Nietzschean concepts, *genealogy* and what Nietzsche understands through *wirkliche Historie* (in opposition to the traditional way of writing history – found in the second of Nietzsche's *Untimely Meditations*). An example of *wirkliche Historie* is, we can assume, like the *Birth of Tragedy*, Nietzschean writing which scandalized Wilamowitz-Moellendorff (historian and philologist, placed by Nietzsche, probably, in the historian-antiquarian type, who sees history as a collection of details, *antiquarische Betrachtungsart*, with regard to the point of the analyses, falling somewhere between Foucault's point of view and Heidegger's regarding the essential nature of Nietzschean thinking on history (the important moment of determining the notion of *genealogy*, in the sense given to this term by Nietzsche). As is well known, M. Heidegger offered, in the Freiburg-im-Brosgau seminar, during the university year 1938-1939 (the text appearing in vol. 46 of Gesamtausgabe, published by V. Klostermann Publishing House) his own vision of the interpretation of the second *Untimely Meditation*¹⁶, that in which Nietzsche opposes *wirkliche Historie* to the traditional history.

According to Heidegger, Nietzsche appears in Western metaphysical history, as its last expression. His vision of history and of man's historicity is equivocal and confused (obviously, Heidegger refers, comparatively, to his own vision).

As Frédéric Porcher observes, "Nietzsche is the philosopher to whom Heidegger devotes the most courses and seminars (...), Heidegger confronts Nietzsche, approves and disapproves of him, related to the interior evolutions of his personal thinking"¹⁷.

Nietzsche's polemics with the traditional mode (or modalities) of writing history (*Geschichtsschreibung*) echoes not only with Heidegger's work, but also with Michel Foucault's vision of history [if we read Foucault's writings from the '60s and even from the beginning of the next decade, until and including *Surveiller et punir*, from this perspective]. In his considerations, Nietzsche assigned the young generation with the mission of "shaking the concepts which the present time has regarding 'health' and 'culture', till the moment they will be healthy enough to deal again with history and to serve the past under the empire of life..."¹⁸.

In the sense given to it by Nietzsche, the genealogical method opposes to the theological-rational vision of history, as a development in time of the absolute spirit (magistral and, in a sense, *definitive*, illustrated by Hegel). It is the vision of history which makes possible the development of the concept of progress in European culture and, moreover, confers on it the specific character, named by

¹⁶ See Fr. Nietzsche, *Considerații inactuale*, second part, *Despre foloasele și daunele istoriei pentru viață*, in Fr. Nietzsche, *Opere complete*, translated by Simion Dănilă (after the critical edition Colli-Montinari), vol. 2, Hestia Publishing House, Timișoara, 1998, pp. 161-221.

¹⁷ Frédéric Porcher, *Martin Heidegger: Interprétation de la deuxième Considération intempestive de Nietzsche. Un cours éclairant autant Heidegger que Nietzsche*, ActaPhilosophia, Dimanche 13 décembre, 2009.

¹⁸ Fr. Nietzsche, *op. cit.*, pp. 219-220.

Spengler, *faustic*. It has been observed that, this faustic spirit lead to the development of an immanent-rational and pragmatic-technical vision of the world, essentially different from the cyclical and trans-historical conception of time, which characterizes most Ancient cultures.

Nietzsche is, in his writings, the partisan of this ancient vision, named the eternal return of the same, *die ewige Wiederkehr des Gleichen* (Heidegger sees here the “fundamental thought of Nietzsche’s metaphysics”¹⁹). Since the second *Untimely Meditation*, he theorizes the necessity of an *historical* and *trans-historical* vision, from the altitude from which history itself can be judged.

This is the point at which Nietzsche becomes an inspirational source for the methodological reflections in the text entitled by Foucault, *Nietzsche, la généalogie, l’histoire*. In a particular sense, Foucault re-reads this own work from a Nietzschean perspective, more precisely, applying to his writings the genealogical perspective of the *Genealogy of Morals*. Foucault seems to discover, re-reading Nietzsche, that he has himself always practiced (like Monsieur Jourdain, without knowing it) Nietzsche’s genealogical method: “gray, meticulous, and patiently documentary. It operates on a field of entangled and confused parchments, on documents that have been scratched over and recopied many times”²⁰. Genealogy, glosses Foucault on the first pages of the *Genealogy of Morals*, proposes to “record the singularity of events outside any monotonous finality; it must seek them in the most unpromising places, in what we tend to feel is without history-in sentiments, love, conscience, instincts”²¹; genealogy tries to “be sensitive to their recurrence, not in order to trace the gradual curve of their evolution, but to isolate the different scenes where they engaged in different roles”²². It is a quite faithfully descriptive of the inner structure of the Foucauldian writings from the 1960s until and inclusive of *Surveiller et punir*.

Genealogy, specifies Foucault, “consequently, requires patience and a knowledge of details, and it depends on a vast accumulation of sources”²³, “in short, it demands relentless (*acharnement*) erudition”²⁴. Genealogy “does not oppose itself to history as the lofty and profound gaze of the philosopher might be compared to the mole-like perspective of the scholar; on the contrary, it rejects the metahistorical deployment of ideal significations and indefinite teleologies. It opposes itself to the search for ‘origins’”²⁵.

Indeed, the search for the phenomena *origins* is, following Nietzsche, the source of a *cultural attitude*, which appears in the ancient Greeks and which becomes generalized in European culture as *metaphysics*. In a fragment from *Human All-too-Human I*, Nietzsche notes: “Philosophers are in the habit of setting themselves before life and experience – before that which they call the world of appearance – as before a picture that is once for all unrolled and exhibits unchangeably fixed

¹⁹ Martin Heidegger, *Die ewige Wiederkehr des Gleichen*, Romanian translation, *Despre eterna reîntoarcere a aceluiași*, Humanitas Publishing House, Bucharest, 2014.

²⁰ Michel Foucault, *Nietzsche, la généalogie, l’histoire, Dits et Écrits I*, ed. cit., p. 1004.

²¹ *Ibidem*.

²² *Ibidem*.

²³ *Ibidem*.

²⁴ *Ibidem*.

²⁵ *Ibidem*.

the same process, – this process, they think, must be rightly interpreted in order to come to a conclusion about the being that produced the picture: about the thing-in-itself, therefore, which is always accustomed to be regarded as sufficient ground for the world of phenomenon”²⁶. This separation of the visible world from a presumed noumenal world, of the Kantian thing-in-itself (*das Ding an sich*), which, according to Nietzsche, gives birth to Platonism and later on, to Christian *Judeo-Platonism*, appears as a negation of life, as a malady of the European spirit which will lead, eventually, to what Nietzsche has called *nihilism*. Nietzsche’s philosophy is a passionate one, radical and (we could say) prophetic, regarding the fight with *European nihilism*, with modernity as an anthropological engagement, as a relation with the world.

Foucault observes, in the above text, that Nietzsche uses the complex resources of the German language, using multiple terms for designating the notion of *origin*: *Ursprung*, *Entstehung*, *Herkunft*, *Abkunft*, *Geburt*. Each of these terms designates the idea of origin, but seen from another perspective, so they are not entirely equivalent (although, notes Foucault, Nietzsche himself is not entirely consistent in this specialized usage of these terms). So, in the introduction to *Genealogy of Morals*, Nietzsche seems to oppose *Ursprung* to *Herkunft*; the word *Ursprung*, following Foucault, evokes an immutable, essential origin: “an attempt to capture the exact essence of things, their purest possibilities, and their carefully protected identities; because this search assumes the existence of immobile forms that precede the external world of accident and succession. This search is directed to ‘that which was already there’ [...]”²⁷. “In the last instance, the term *Ursprung* directs itself, according to Foucault, to a final *truth*, anterior to any positive experience”²⁸.

As it is known, this problem of the *truth* is one of the most sensitive from the Nietzschean perspective. It appears in one of the first of Nietzsche’s writings, *On Truth and Lies in a Nonmoral Sense*²⁹ (*Über Wahrheit und Lüge im außermoralischen Sinne*, 1873). Here Nietzsche separates himself from the rationalist line of European philosophy, with its origins in the Aristotle’s vision of truth as *adaequatio intellectus et rei* (like the formula from the Thomist *Summa*, 1; 16.1).

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On the other hand, Foucault observes, that terms such as “*Entstehung* and *Herkunft* are more exact than *Ursprung* in recording the true objective of genealogy”³⁰. And, while they are usually translated as ‘origin’ one must attempt

²⁶ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Opere complete 3, Omenesc, prea omenesc I și II*, translated by Simion Dănilă, Hestia Publishing House, Timișoara, 2000, p. 30.

²⁷ Michel Foucault, *Nietzsche, la généalogie, l’histoire, Dits et Écrits I, ed. cit.*, p. 1006.

²⁸ *Ibidem*.

²⁹ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Opere complete 2, Despre adevăruri și minciună în sens extramoral*, pp. 557-566.

³⁰ In the essay *Genealogia și istoria. Nietzsche în lectura lui Foucault* (published in *Hermeneia*, no. 5/2005, pp. 88-107), George Bondor observes that Foucault’s attempt to systematize the sense of the terms used by Nietzsche for indicating the idea of “origin” offers only approximative results, the role of the context being, in this case, determined.

to reestablish their correct meaning.³¹ “*Herkunft* is the equivalent of stock or descent; it is the ancient affiliation to a group, sustained by the bonds of blood, tradition, or social class. The analysis of *Herkunft* often involves considerations of race or social type”³², notes Foucault. *Entstehung*, as a term referring to the origin “designates emergence, the moment of arising”.³³ The emergence of a phenomena “produced through a particular convergence of forces. The analysis of the *Entstehung* must delineate this interaction, the struggle these forces wage against each other or against adverse circumstances, and the attempt to avoid degeneration and regain strength by dividing these forces against themselves”.³⁴ “What Nietzsche calls the *Entstehungsherd* of the concept of goodness is not specifically the energy of the strong or the reaction of the weak, but precisely this scene where they are displayed superimposed or face-to-face”³⁵, observes Foucault.

Continuing his essay, Foucault asks “how can we define the relationship between genealogy, seen as the examination of *Herkunft* and *Entstehung*, and history in the traditional sense? We could, of course, examine Nietzsche’s celebrated tropes against history [...] but we will put these aside for the moment and consider those instances when he conceives of genealogy as *wirkliche Historie*, or its more frequent characterization as historical ‘spirit’ or ‘sense’”.³⁶ “In fact, Nietzsche’s criticism, beginning with the second of the *Untimely Meditations*, always questioned the form of history that traduces (and always assumes) a supra-historical perspective: a history whose function is to compose the fine grained diversity of time into a totality fully closed upon itself; a history that always encourages subjective recognitions and attributes a form of reconciliation to all the displacements of the past; a history whose perspective on all that precedes it implies the end of time, a completed development”.³⁷

From a genealogical point of view, history and what Nietzsche calls metaphysics are inextricable linked. Foucault explains: “The locus of emergence for metaphysics was surely Athenian demagoguery, the vulgar spite of Socrates and his belief in immortality [...] The problem was similar in the nineteenth century: to avoid doing for the popular asceticism of historians what Plato did for Socrates. This historical trait should not be founded on a philosophy of history, but dismantled, beginning with the things it produced; it is necessary to master history so as to turn it to genealogical uses, that is, strictly anti-Platonic purposes. Only then will the historical sense free itself from the demands of a supra-historical history”.³⁸

The conclusion of the present essay is that: “*Untimely Meditations* discussed the critical use of history: its just treatment of the past, its decisive cutting of the roots, its rejection of traditional attitudes of reverence, its liberation of man by

³¹ Michel Foucault, *Nietzsche, la généalogie, l’histoire*, loc. cit.

³² *Ibidem*.

³³ *Ibidem*

³⁴ *Loc. cit.*, p. 1011.

³⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 1012.

³⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 1014.

³⁷ *Ibidem*.

³⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 1020.

presenting him with other origins than those in which he prefers to see himself. Nietzsche, however, reproached critical history for detaching us from every real source and for sacrificing the very movement of life to the exclusive concern for truth. Somewhat later, as we have seen, Nietzsche reconsiders this line of thought he had at first refused, but directs it to altogether different ends. It is no longer a question of judging the past in the name of a truth that only we can possess in the present, but of risking the destruction of the subject who seeks knowledge in the endless deployment of the will to knowledge [*dans la volonté (...) de savoir*]³⁹.

One of the last texts by Foucault before his premature death, on 25 June 1984, is a short essay entitled *Qu'est-ce que les Lumières?*, which was published in *Magazine littéraire*, no. 207, May 1987. This text reexamines, partially, the content of the same theme he examined at the Collège de France, in 1983.⁴⁰ Another part of this appears in the English collected works entitled *The Foucault Reader*,⁴¹ edited by Paul Rainbow in 1984. Both must be read together: together, they comprise the last text in which Foucault evokes the tutelary figure of Nietzsche.

Debating the theme of the Enlightenment philosophical project, Foucault starts to restore, in a way, the *genealogy* of the problematics, which reclaims from a historical perspective, from the opinions expressed by Kant in the opuscula which responds the questions addressed to the readers of the publication *Berlinische Monatsschrift*, in December 1784: "What is Enlightenment?" (*Was ist Aufklärung?*). To this question, Moses Mendelssohn, the promoter within the German world of the movement inspired by the European Enlightenment *Haskala*, had already answered in the same journal, speaking, of course, on the problem of Jewish emancipation through culture.

In the opuscula entitled *Beantwortung der Frage: Was ist Aufklärung?*, Kant sees in Enlightenment a way out from the *status of immaturity*, in which someone stands when they accept someone else's authority in an area where the use of reason is called for. Foucault further comments: "Kant gives three examples: we are in a state of 'immaturity' when a book takes the place of our understanding, when a spiritual director takes the place of our conscience, when a doctor decides for us what our diet is to be. (Let us note in passing that the register of these three critiques is easy to recognize, even though the text does not make it explicit)".⁴² In other words, the way out from the status of immaturity involves reclaiming personal reason, instead of accepting in an uncritical way opinion lacking any rational basis, relying only on external authorities (compared by Kant to a tutelage of personal will).

Kant introduces a distinction which requires a separate discussion, regarding the private and public uses of reason. The private use of reason, in the understanding

³⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 1024.

⁴⁰ See also, *Foucault et les Lumières*, dossier sous la direction de Fabienne Brugère et al., Bordeaux, 2007.

⁴¹ *The Foucault Reader*, edited by Paul Rabinow, Pantheon Books, New York, 1984 (the translation from French from the vol., Michel Foucault, *Dits et Écrits II*, ed. cit., pp. 1381-1397).

⁴² Michel Foucault, *Qu'est-ce que les Lumières?*, in Michel Foucault, *Dits et Écrits II*, p. 1383.

given by Kant, is the use of reason in the context of a civil function. In other words, if a man has a public role, he must renounce his freedom to use reason, because he is not entirely free, but part of a mechanism which requires the coordination of actions (for example, in the military field). On the other hand, the public use of reason assumes that reasonable debate must be free from external considerations (for example, philosophical reason must be not distorted by the use of arguments from authority).

Kant's text is, according to Foucault, important in order to analyze our own epoch. We are determined, to a certain extent, by that complex of ideas called the Enlightenment (*les Lumières*, *Aufklärung*, *Il Luminismo* etc.). Now is the time to become aware of this and to examine it from the point of view of critical reason – this is Foucault's conclusion. In order to view this reality critically, we must have recourse to the Nietzschean critical spirit, continuing in the tradition of other significant modern philosophers (and, implicitly, of modern philosophy, we may add): Hegel, Max Weber, coryphaei of Frankfurt School. Following Foucault's formula, it is necessary to align a philosophical *ethos* to the critical ontology of ourselves ("l'ethos philosophique propre à l'ontologie critique de nous mêmes").⁴³

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⁴³ *Ibidem*, p. 1394.