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# The Body of Ideas: Nietzsche, Embodiment, and the Genealogical Method

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THE BODY OF IDEAS: NIETZSCHE, EMBODIMENT, AND THE GENEALOGICAL  
METHOD

by

MATTHEW KELLEY

Under the Direction of Jessica Berry, PhD

ABSTRACT

How are we to understand Nietzsche's ubiquitous use of physiological language and imagery in *On the Genealogy of Morality*? I claim that Nietzsche's use of physiological language is a crucial element of the method of historical investigation he develops ("genealogy"). If Nietzsche's genealogy attends to the practices of moral concepts, then the physiological undergoing of those practices will be important data for the genealogist. In other words, in Nietzsche's critical-historical investigation of morality, accounts of physiological experience will be crucial for having an accurate picture of the practices under investigation. This improved mode of historical investigation sees morality not simply as set of beliefs, but as a lived practice.

INDEX WORDS: Nietzsche, Foucault, Genealogy, Physiology, Philosophy of History

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METHOD

by

MATTHEW KELLEY

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

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NIETZSCHE, EMBODIMENT, AND THE GENEALOGICAL METHOD

by

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**DEDICATION**

Bruce James Smith, 1924 – 2018

Organizer, Teacher, and Devious Socratic

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**TABLE OF CONTENTS**

<b>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS .....</b>	<b>V</b>
<b>LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS .....</b>	<b>VII</b>
<b>1 INTRODUCTION .....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>2 BODIES AND PHYSIOLOGICAL LANGUAGE .....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>3 NIETZSCHE'S GENEALOGY.....</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>4 FOUCAULT'S GENEALOGY .....</b>	<b>17</b>
<b>5 CONCLUSION: NIETZSCHE, GENEALOGY, AND PHYSIOLOGICAL EXPERIENCE .....</b>	<b>21</b>
<b>REFERENCES.....</b>	<b>27</b>

## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

### Works by Friedrich Nietzsche:

- GM* *On the Genealogy of Morality: A Polemic*. Translated by Maudemarie Clark and Alan Swensen. Indianapolis: Hackett, 1998.
- GS* *The Gay Science*. Translated by Josefine Nauckhoff. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2001.
- HH* *Human, All Too Human: A Book for Free Spirits*. Translated by R. J. Hollingdale. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1996.

## 1 INTRODUCTION

Vivid physiological language and descriptions of embodied experience saturate Nietzsche's *On the Genealogy of Morality*. He tells us that the future of every person "digs inexorably like a spur into the flesh of every present" (GM III 13), that pain in one's soul "is *not*, crudely put, due to his soul; more like to his belly..." (GM III 16), and that "man is sicker, more unsure, more changing, more undetermined than any other animal... he is *the* sick animal" (GM III 13). What are we to make of these references to flesh, bellies, and sickness? How could the "present" have a "flesh"? What do spiritual pains have to do with indigestion? And what does it mean to say that modern humans are, by default, sick animals?

As a start, we could note that Nietzsche uses this language amidst his declared project: a critique of conventional, Christian morality. He tells us in the Preface of the *Genealogy* that he means to make a new challenge: "*for once the value of these values must itself be called into question*" (GM P 6). In other words, Nietzsche is not interested here in determining what kinds of actions are morally good and which are morally bad: his critique investigates *where* the judgments of "good" and "bad" come from in the first place and what criteria we have for evaluating these value judgments. But what does it mean, then, for Nietzsche to indicate that a pain in my soul – say, feeling guilty – likely comes from a pain in my stomach? Does Nietzsche think our judgments of "good" and "bad" come from our diets?

To further complicate the issue, Nietzsche uses these descriptions of physiological experience as a part of a project he understands to be historical, and this inclusion of history, for Nietzsche, is central. He accuses his predecessors of "hypothesizing *into the blue*" (GM P 7) or theorizing abstractly and ahistorically about human morality without paying attention to concrete and observable details. Nietzsche's mistaken predecessors assume any given moral principle to

be God-given and eternal, whereas Nietzsche believes philosophers should make no assumptions about the timelessness or universality of a principle and to look into its history. Philosophers who have concrete history in mind will ask questions like: “How did the idea of selflessness develop? Has selflessness always been lauded? Under what conditions did it emerge? Has it changed through time?” Nietzsche finds the latter option to be superior, and he declares his project to be a “*history of morality*” (GM P 7). But what place do descriptions of embodied experience have in a history of morality? What does physiology have to do with history?

We can understand Nietzsche’s inclusion of physiological experience by seeing its role within the critical-historical method he develops. Nietzsche’s improved mode of doing history – “genealogy” – pays attention to the practice of a concept through history, rather than its purpose. Paying attention to a practice means taking note of the observable details of the execution of the practice and leaving aside assumptions or questions about why someone is performing the practice. Taking the moral concept of selflessness as an example, a genealogist would ask questions like: “Under what circumstances do people act selflessly? What motivations do they have? What do selfless acts look like – i.e., what are people doing with their bodies when they act selflessly? Are certain kinds of people more likely to be selfless, and not others? What historical conditions made selfless action possible? Do the answers to these questions change through history?” By investigating a practice itself, without making assumptions about its guiding purpose, Nietzsche believes we can gain fruitful insight into the history of morality. This insight may be disturbing: we may come to see that what we held to be good has a troubling history. We can learn, as Nietzsche attempts to show, that practices of selflessness were valued at some points in history and denigrated at others (GM I 2), that selflessness may have been a means for one group of people to gain power over another (GM I 8), that practices of selflessness

tend to be accompanied by feelings of powerlessness and self-loathing (GM I 10). This knowledge, Nietzsche believes, can give us ground for the revaluation of values he calls for.

My claim is this: if Nietzsche's genealogy attends to the observable practices of moral concepts, then the physiological undergoing of those practices will be important data for the genealogist. In other words, in Nietzsche's critical-historical investigation of morality, accounts of physiological experience will be crucial for having an accurate picture of the practices under investigation. For example, when Nietzsche describes the dyspeptic bowels of the priestly caste, he is not (or not only) trying to narrate for us the history of the clergy's abdominal discomfort; he is arguing that taking stock of the embodied experience of the priest shows us something critical that traditional histories lack and directs us toward "the morality which has really existed, really been lived..." (GM P 7). This improved mode of historical investigation sees morality not simply as a set of beliefs, but as a lived practice. Morality, in Nietzsche's sense, is embodied. In what follows, I will show: (1) how this claim squares with and clarifies Nietzsche's own descriptions of his method, and (2) that Foucault's adaptation of Nietzsche's genealogy further develops genealogy's critical potential by picking up on the crucial emphasis on embodied experience.

Two mutually-informing drives animate this project. The first is an interest in contributing to the discussion in the history of philosophy on how genealogy, as a method practiced by Nietzsche, actually works. As such, I will stay close to Nietzsche's writing and give a careful exegesis. This care, however, runs in tandem with a second drive, which sees genealogy as a method that other philosophers could pick up and carry beyond Nietzsche.<sup>1</sup> I hope to lay out

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<sup>1</sup> Several philosophers have already made efforts to do so, and I walk in their footsteps in this project. See, for example, Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (1995) & *The History of Sexuality, Volume 1: An Introduction* (1990), Cornell West, *Prophesy Deliverance! An Afro-American Revolutionary Christianity* (2002: 47-68), Ladelle McWhorter, *Bodies and Pleasures* (1999) & *Racism and Sexual Oppression in*

a description of a genealogical method that shows its continuing critical power and treats it as a living means of social criticism. While I see myself primarily in these pages as an historian of philosophy, I have an eye toward the political and social implications of my claims.

I divide my argument into several sections. I first overview the ubiquity of physiological language to be found throughout the *Genealogy* and show that two interpretations of this language (it is broadly metaphorical and it is broadly literal) are insufficient. I then gloss key features of Nietzsche's genealogical method in an effort to clarify the centrality of Nietzsche's focus on practices. I use the taxonomy of Foucaultian terms developed by Colin Koopman and Tomas Matza (2013) to clarify the role practices and physiology play in Nietzsche's work. Turning to Foucault and his remarks in his essay, "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History," and in his book, *Discipline and Punish*, I draw out and emphasize the centrality of embodied experience in the iteration of genealogy he practices. I use Foucault's emphasis to underscore Nietzsche's use of physiological language as a key component of genealogical investigation.

## 2 BODIES AND PHYSIOLOGICAL LANGUAGE

Nietzsche's employment of physiological language is widespread and multifarious in the *Genealogy*. This language encompasses physical descriptions and capacities like the healthy, powerful physical activity of ancient warrior societies (GM I 7 & 11), and the senses, including the value-establishing glance of the aristocrat (GM I 10 & 11), the significance of perspective for knowledge (GM III 12), and the taste of life (GM II 7). He also makes reference to a variety of bodily processes like digestion (GM I 1) and rumination (GM P 7), pregnancy (GM II 18 & 19), and sleep (GM III 17). Ailment is also a theme of his physiological language: he frequently calls

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*Anglo-America: A Genealogy* (2009), and Colin Koopman, *How We Became Our Data: A Genealogy of the Informational Person* (forthcoming 2019).

morality a disease (GM P 6, II 7, III 13, and others) and has a specific interest in intestinal disorders (GM II 1 & III 8), medical diagnosis (GM P 6) and treatment (GM III 15).<sup>2</sup> Nietzsche often uses physiological language to describe a notorious group in the *Genealogy*: priests. He calls them timid and craven (GM I 12 & 13), smelly (GM I 12), and clear sufferers of gastro-intestinal issues: “From the beginning there is something *unhealthy* in such priestly aristocracies and in the habits ruling there, ones turned away from action, partly brooding, partly emotionally explosive, habits that have as a consequence the intestinal disease and neurasthenia that almost unavoidably clings to the priests of all ages” (GM I 6). This description of priests takes place in the beginnings of Nietzsche’s historical critique of Christian morality, and he takes these priests to be early, unattractive exemplars. Why does he describe them as sedentary, psychologically unstable, and afflicted as a part of a critique of morality? Why not use more traditional moral language like, “the emergent priestly caste was complacent, unfair and inconsistent in their judgment, and cowardly”? At best, these physiological descriptions sound irrelevant, at worst, *ad hominem*.

Physiological language and descriptions of embodied experience, I will argue, are integral to Nietzsche’s critical, historical methodology and the conclusions he draws. In the preface, when articulating the need for “a *critique* of moral values” and “a knowledge of the conditions and circumstances out of which they have grown, under which they have developed and shifted,” Nietzsche tells us that the “knowledge” needed for the critique of morality he

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<sup>2</sup> This language is not unique to the *Genealogy*; Nietzsche’s interest in physiological explanation and experience can be found earlier in his *oeuvre*. See, for example, HH 224 for the ‘inoculating’ effects of the degenerate and 243 for his praise of the physician. His remarks on biological need and metaphysics in the preface to the second edition of *The Gay Science* are particularly suggestive: “I have asked myself often enough whether, on a grand scale, philosophy has been no more than an interpretation of the body, and a *misunderstanding of the body*” (GS P2 2). For an overview of Nietzsche’s proximity to the late 19<sup>th</sup>-century fascination with biology and evolution, see the introduction to Greg Moore’s *Nietzsche, Biology and Metaphor* (2002: 1-10). My interest in Nietzsche’s use of physiological language and embodied experience is broader than their relation to the natural sciences for reasons discussed below.

intends to make is knowledge of “morality as consequence, as symptom, as mask, as Tartuffery, as sickness, as misunderstanding; but also morality as cause, as medicine, as stimulus, as inhibitor, as poison” (GM P 6). In other words, when describing the material he will use to make his critique, Nietzsche uses language that could only apply to bodies: symptom, sickness, medicine, and poison all apply to bodily health and illness. What, then, are we to make of this language?

One might read Nietzsche’s use of these figures as a dramatic but peripheral ornamentation. If we were to read this language metaphorically, we might take Nietzsche’s remarks from the preface quoted above to mean that he uses terms like symptom, sickness, medicine, and poison as simply *illustrative* of his actual point. This reading would make the mistake Christopher Janaway points out: “To treat Nietzsche’s ways of writing—explicitly or implicitly—as mere modes of presentation, detachable in principle from some elusive set of propositions in which his philosophy might be thought to consist, is to miss a great part of Nietzsche’s real importance to philosophy” (2007: 3-4). A metaphorical reading, detached from what Nietzsche “actually” means, would judge him to be saying something like, “morality may turn out to be something *like* a sickness, or *comparable to* medicine.” To the contrary, Nietzsche makes explicit his nonmetaphorical use of physiological explanation. For example, at the end of the first treatise, he writes, “every ‘thou shalt,’ of which history or ethnological research is aware, needs *physiological* illumination and interpretation first of all” (GM I 17). If bodily diagnoses are to be primary for research into the history of morality, we cannot take Nietzsche to be saying physiological language is, at least, only a useful but peripheral metaphor. There must be some cases where Nietzsche uses physiological language literally. Other remarks from the *Genealogy* cast doubt on an exclusively metaphorical reading as well. For instance, when



describing the creation of memory in the First Treatise, Nietzsche writes, “The human being in whom this suppression apparatus is damaged and stops functioning is comparable to a dyspeptic (*and not just comparable--*) he can’t ‘process’ anything...” (GM II 1, my emphasis). And later, when attacking the idea of sin, he argues, “‘sinfulness’ in humans is not a factual state but rather only the interpretation of a factual state, namely of being physiologically out of sorts...” (GM III 16). For Nietzsche, the dyspepsia of memory and the factual state priests interpret as sinfulness are not illusions. If we are to take Nietzsche at his word, we must treat the physiological language in these passages as, in some sense, actual (“and not just comparable”).

Are we, then, to interpret Nietzsche’s physiological language as exclusively literal? Alexander Nehamas writes that Nietzsche “often imagines, in a naïve and sometimes crude way, that the causes of this ‘illness’ are straightforwardly physiological. I see no reason for accepting this aspect of his view” (1985: 120). Nietzsche himself gives evidence of Nehamas’ claim: as we read, he argues that physiological interpretation is simply needed “first of all.” Returning to the example of the priest, it would be wrongheaded to take Nietzsche to be arguing that the morality of the priestly caste is best explained, reductively, as intestinal constipation (the undesirable features of which could be ‘cured’ by taking laxatives). Reading Nietzsche’s physiological language straightforwardly is insufficient; his critique of morality does not stop with medical diagnosis. The physical *experience* undergone by individuals – patients, sufferers, or priests – matters to Nietzsche; it matters that priests smell *bad*; it is significant data that the indigestion of memory is *unpleasant*; it is not peripheral that the anesthesia the sufferer seeks is a *relief*. We cannot, as a rule it seems, read Nietzsche’s physiological language reductively as straightforwardly literal.

At this juncture, it seems we are at an impasse in terms of how to interpret Nietzsche's physiological language. We cannot systematically dismiss it as metaphor, merely illustrative, or peripheral to his project. We also cannot read all of his physiological language as a call for straightforward medical diagnosis. How, then, are we to read these confusing passages? I argue that situating Nietzsche's physiological language and accounts of bodily experience in his genealogical method will provide us an answer.

### 3 NIETZSCHE'S GENEALOGY

Nietzsche contends that traditional methods of investigating the history of moral concepts are misguided, and in the *Genealogy*, he argues that his genealogical method improves upon that of his predecessors. In this section, I hope to make clear Nietzsche's critique of traditional histories of morality. Moreover, this criticism and the development of Nietzsche's alternative through the *Genealogy* shows a methodological innovation and a new mode of doing history: genealogy. What chiefly sets genealogy apart from other modes of historical investigation, I will argue, is its attention to the *practice* of a concept, rather than the alleged *purpose* of that concept. A genealogist withholds assumptions about, for example, *why* a given society or culture practices punishment, and investigates *what* specific instructions, institutions, motivations, and circumstances accompany the practice itself. If practices are the focus of genealogical investigation, then, I claim, the physiological experience of those practices is vital data for the genealogist. Situating Nietzsche's use of physiological language in his method will provide a helpful means of understanding this language throughout the *Genealogy*.

Nietzsche conceived of genealogy not as the invention of a new discipline, but as simply "history, correctly practiced" (Nehamas 1985: 246, n. 1). This means that a genealogist and an

historian share much methodological ground. Moreover, this historical ground is necessary for philosophy. Well before the *Genealogy*, Nietzsche was frustrated with his philosophical predecessors' ignorance of history:

All philosophers have the common failing of starting out from man as he is now and thinking they can reach their goal through an analysis of him. They involuntarily think of 'man' as an *aeterna veritas*, as something that remains constant in the midst of all flux, as a sure measure of things. Everything the philosopher has declared about man is, however, no more than a testimony as to the man of a *very limited* period of time. Lack of historical sense is the family failing of all philosophers (HH I 2).

Nietzsche here outlines a critique of the philosophical belief that the qualities, purposes, and utilities of what is present now have always been so when, really, our present perspective grants us only that: perspective on the present. The family failing of all philosophers is the failure to see that concepts, beliefs, and humans themselves have changed through time: a proper philosophical approach would need to be informed by history, by how something has changed and developed.

In the *Genealogy*, Nietzsche takes aim at Paul Rée as a proponent of the traditional, mistaken means of investigating the history of moral concepts (GM P 4, 5 & 7). Although Rée sees himself as an historian, his mistake falls within the group of family failings Nietzsche criticizes. Rée's method takes the *purpose* of a practice for granted and assumes it to be unitary and unchanging through history. Such an historian might argue, for example: "The purpose of punishment is to admonish and correct a wrongdoer or a criminal. History shows the development of practices that more and more effectively admonish and correct."

Raymond Geuss suggests we could call this traditional method "tracing a pedigree" (2001: 322). We trace a pedigree in the interest of "positively valorizing some (usually

contemporary) person, institution or thing” by tracking its alleged value “through a series of unbroken steps of transmission to a singular origin” which is “an actual source of value” in itself (Geuss 2001: 323). Such a “pedigree” of punishment, for example, would present a history of our present practice of punishment in an effort to justify it: as a way to admonish and correct a criminal, punishment could find its original source of value in the ancient notion of health and wellness, track a wandering path through the medieval era’s purging of sin, note the introduction of psychology and medicine in nineteenth-century incarceration, and conclude with a championing of Scandinavian-style open prisons as a cumulative, humane, gentle, and reasonable means to heal and reintegrate law-breakers. Within this history, the *purpose* of punishing is never really questioned; it remains, at all points, to admonish and correct. Moreover, at each point in the narrative, we see the criminal as unwell or unhealthy. The pedigree purports to show us increasingly better ways of admonishment and correction, more and more effective means of healing the sickness of the law-breaker. Finally, we end with a justification of our present carceral practices.

Nietzsche is critical of histories as pedigrees. According to his critique, a history that leaves the purpose of a practice untouched, unchallenged, and unquestioned presupposes that the purpose is and has been essential and stable through history. This traditional mode of historical investigation, according to Nehamas, assumes “that the dominant sense of a word, the accepted interpretation of a value, or the current function of an institution is naturally appropriate to it and never the product of earlier operations, of reversals, impositions, and appropriations” (1985: 110). In other words, histories as pedigrees omit the possibility that the purpose of a practice changes through time. Yet practitioners of punishment, for example, likely punished for different reasons and with different justifications throughout history.

Instead of holding the purpose of a practice as a constant, then, Nietzsche's genealogical method does not assume the purpose of the practice beforehand, and takes practice itself as a starting point. His method, then, investigates the different reasons and purposes we have assigned to that practice through history. I take this move to be the main distinguishing feature of Nietzsche's historical method. He contends that in each instance of a practice there is something "permanent" and something "fluid" to be considered. The permanent quality is the "act" of a practice, or its "strict sequence of procedures" (GM II 12). The fluid quality is the "meaning," "purpose" or "expectation tied to the execution of such procedures" (GM II 12). Geuss describes this division as a "bipartite structure": "a set of antecedently existing practices, modes of behavior, perception, and feeling which at a certain time are given an interpretation which imposes upon them a meaning they did not have before" (2001: 329). Where the traditional historians of morality seek a fixed meaning that informs the concrete procedures, Nietzsche reverses the order of priority: "the procedure itself will be something older, earlier than its use for punishment, that the latter [its meaning] was placed into, interpreted into the procedure..." (GM II 13). In this way, the practice (the concrete procedures, methods, or motions) is something inherited, something into which its practitioners have imported a meaning; the purposes for exercising the practice, the uses for which it comes to be justified, the utilities it allegedly bears, are brought to it only after the fact.

These *post hoc* meanings, for Nietzsche, signal something further: "all purposes, all utilities, are only *signs* that a will to power has become lord over something less powerful and has stamped its own functional meaning onto it..." (GM II 12). Not only are meanings posterior to the extant practices, but the very presence of a meaning or interpretation superimposed on some practice suggests that a certain political victory has already been fought and won. For

Nietzsche, in pursuing a genealogy of morality one may not presuppose that a group of people identifies a need and then concocts a procedure of satisfying that need. History is a contest of “wills” that, in seeking to express their power, vie over the interpretation of a material, inherited practice. The victory of one interpretation over another does not signal the establishment of any kind of essential truth about the practice any more than the victory of one political candidate over another establishes a permanent political consensus. Geuss makes the further point that the vying interpreters are not seeking to destroy the practices and replace them, but rather to “impress on them the stamp of a certain meaning, give them a certain direction” (2001: 331). The development of a practice, like punishment, through history, is not progress towards a goal, but rather “the succession of more or less profound, more or less independent processes of overpowering that play themselves out in it, including resistances expended each time against these processes...” (GM II 12). Acknowledging the existence of and then attending carefully to this entangled battle of interpretations, for Nietzsche, yields a more accurate and compelling mode of historical investigation than tracing “pedigrees.” In addition, attention to this battle is what gives genealogy its critical potential—the chief contribution of Nietzsche’s novel historical method.

For Nietzsche, the history of morality that the genealogical method reveals is meant to serve as a means of criticizing conventional morality. Genealogy serves as a tool in Nietzsche’s broader project: “a *critique* of moral values, *for once the value of these values must itself be called into question*—and for this we need a knowledge of the conditions and circumstances out of which they have grown...” (GM P 6). While the literature is not united on how history can act

as a vehicle of criticism,<sup>3</sup> for Nietzsche the “knowledge” of the history of moral concepts is necessary for their critique. In broad strokes, we can say that genealogies destabilize monolithic justifications of contemporary practices. Using the example of Christian morality, Geuss writes, “The genealogy reveals Christian morality to arise from the historically contingent conjunction of a large number of such *separate* series of processes” (2001: 325). This, at the very least, “severs” the connections between contemporary practice and historic origin that conventional history claims for them; according to Leiter, we should take Nietzsche to be arguing that “from the present value/meaning/purpose of an object, we are entitled to no inference about its origin” (2015: 135). More forcefully, thinkers like Nehamas argue that, as a result of criticizing a “pedigree,” “genealogy has direct practical consequences because, by demonstrating the contingent character of the institutions that traditional history exhibits as unchanging, it creates the possibility of altering them” (1985: 112). Revealing this contingency shows that the meanings of inherited practices are not, as Colin Koopman writes, “inevitable” (2013: 4). In other words, we should see genealogy as a means of reevaluating current practices of assigning value.

While traditional histories attempt to uncover the lineage of some singular purpose of a practice in history, the genealogical method demands that we attend to the battle of interpretations over the meaning of that practice. Genealogy turns our attention to the contingency, complexity, and plurality of our practices and their history. A genealogy does not yield a “definition” in the sense of a singular meaning of a practice – as Nietzsche notes, “only

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<sup>3</sup> For an example of a view describing a more limited critical force, see Leiter (2015: 133-144), and for a response to Leiter arguing for a stronger critical capacity, see Merrick (2016: 234). The present thesis will not engage in this debate but will simply assume that genealogy has *some* valuable critical power.

that which has no history is definable” (GM II 13).<sup>4</sup> Geuss comments, “Instead of a ‘definition’ one must try to give an ‘analysis’ of the contingent synthesis of ‘meaning’ Christianity (for instance) represents. This process of disentangling the separate strands will take the form of a historical account... The appropriate historical account is a genealogy” (2001: 333). A genealogy yields an analysis of the “strands” the varying wills to power have woven through our current practice. It is the patient task of a genealogist to “disentangle” these threads and reveal the historical conflicts that gave rise to our present understandings of the purpose of a practice.

I take Nietzsche’s attention to practices to be the crucial distinguishing feature of his historical method, as this focus allows for the historical battle of wills to become visible. I contend, moreover, that this feature explains Nietzsche’s use of physiological language and descriptions of embodied experience. Practices are embodied: from a handshake, to punishment, to writing a paper, a body must either perform or undergo the practice to accomplish it. Following Nietzsche’s distinction, the body carrying out the practice and the physiological experience of the practice are two “permanent” components of all practices, as compared to other “fluid” components. Thus, if practices are the material Nietzsche investigates to reveal the battle of wills, the physiological experience of executing or undergoing those practices will be an essential component of an accurate account of those practices.

In order to demonstrate this, I will use Colin Koopman and Tomas Matza’s taxonomy of Foucaultian terms (2013) as a means to distinguish the various elements of Nietzsche’s genealogical method as discussed above. In particular, I contend that we can find the same distinctions between *methods*, *categories*, and *objects of inquiry* in Nietzsche’s work as Koopman and Matza do in Foucault’s. Illuminating these distinctions will clarify my claim.

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<sup>4</sup> Or, in other words, the only way for a practice to have a stable, essential meaning is for it to not have had a history, i.e., for it to have burst onto the scene, fully-formed, from some transcendent source.



Koopman and Matza think of *methods* as broad “constraints, limits, and assumptions by which inquiry can be conducted in coherent fashion,” and point to Foucaultian genealogy and archeology as examples (2013: 825). *Categories* “function like lenses through which inquiry takes place. Categories bring a field of inquiry into view whereas concepts help make sense of... the objects populating that field” (Koopman and Matza 2013: 825). Categories are distinctions that divide the material which can be investigated appropriately by the method from that which cannot; they are an element in deciding the scope of an investigation. Finally, *objects of inquiry* are what they sound like: the material under scrutiny; that upon which the method comes to bear. In short, methods are the “how” of an investigation, categories are the strictures on what kinds of objects are valid for the method to investigate, and objects are the entities upon which the method comes to bear.

Reading Nietzsche’s critical history of morality with these distinctions in mind is clarifying. Genealogical methods, as we identified, include refusing to accept *prima facie* that a moral concept has had a unitary purpose throughout history and attending to the nitty-gritty details of a practice instead of focusing on grand theories and causes. Categories of Nietzsche’s genealogy include psychology, philology, and, obviously, history. Finally, the objects of inquiry these categories make available include psychological motivations, the processes through which Christian morality emerged, like urbanization, the history of the priestly caste, and specific etymologies.

Following Koopman and Matza, we can say that *practices* constitute a central category of Nietzsche’s genealogy. Remember that his investigation assumes at the outset that we cannot know the purpose of a practice in advance, and thus that we must direct our attention to the execution and undergoing of the practice itself in order to understand its purpose. This indicates

a division between what kinds of material count as valid for investigation: genealogy can come to bear upon practices, but not upon purposes. Using Koopman and Matza's taxonomy, we can say that practices are categories of investigation that make available objects of inquiry like the specific practice of punishment. In that case, we can then investigate who is punishing, who is being punished, what specific procedures are followed, and how these have changed through time. Nietzsche's categorical isolation of practices in his genealogy makes visible the historical contest of wills that supplied vying purposes to those practices. Without the distinction between the categories of practices and purposes, Nietzsche would not have arrived at the same conclusions.

By noting the centrality of the category of practices, for Nietzsche, we can see why so much physiological language accompanies his history. Practices are physiological. All practices are executed or undergone by embodied individuals. Even abstract or cognitive practices carry with them important physiological information (a meditating monk, for example, is motionless). If a genealogist investigates a practice, he must, at the same time, investigate the physiological experience of that practice to have a complete understanding of it. As practices are a category, so too, then, is physiology, and as specific practices are objects of inquiry, so too are accounts of physiological experience. By seeing the role practices play in Nietzsche's genealogy, we should not be surprised by the presence of physiological language: more accurate accounts of a practice will contain descriptions of physiological experience.

In the next section, I will show how Michel Foucault took up and developed Nietzsche's genealogy and applied it to circumstances other than Nietzsche's revaluation of Christian morality. In specific, I focus on how Foucault's attention to bodies should be read as a methodological continuance of Nietzsche's use of the category of physiology.

#### 4 FOUCAULT'S GENEALOGY

In his essay on Nietzsche's genealogical method, "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History," Foucault evocatively writes, "The body is the surface of the inscription of events" (1999: 375). In *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault indicates that the body will be a central element of his thinking: "the body is also directly involved in a political field; power relations have an immediate hold on it; they invest it, mark it, train it, torture it, force it to carry out tasks, to perform ceremonies, to emit signs" (1995: 25). Indeed, he tells us he means to investigate the "political technology of the body" (1995: 26). How should we understand these remarks? We do not, for example, have paragraphs from a history textbook literally written on our skin, and thus it seems we cannot interpret Foucault literally in all cases. On the other hand, it is in no metaphorical sense that the agents of "power relations" can train or torture our bodies, or that we can force them to carry out tasks or perform rituals. How are we to understand Foucault's comments on bodies, and how do they fit into the philosophical method he develops? Hubert Dreyfus and Paul Rabinow pose similar questions and readily admit their confusion about how bodies are supposed to fit into Foucault's genealogy, and ask: "What is the historical importance of such invariant [bodily] structures?... Foucault is uniquely placed to address these questions raised by his work. But, so far, he has remained silent" (1983: 112).

In this section, I hope to clarify the role physiology and embodiment play in Foucault's genealogy by reviewing the methodological approaches he borrows from Nietzsche and seeing his methods at work in *Discipline and Punish*. Physiology and physiological experience, while more pronounced in Foucault's work, take the same place in his genealogy as they do in Nietzsche's: if genealogy as a method of doing history directs our attention to practices, we must

take account of the physiological experience of performing those practices. Accounts of embodied experience – from Nietzsche’s physiological language to Foucault’s attention to bodies – are central to the attention genealogical analysis pays to practices.

Foucault’s genealogy is often regarded as rooted in Nietzsche’s (Dreyfus and Rabinow 1983: 106-111; Leiter 2015: 133-134; Koopman 2013: 18-19.). Like Nietzsche’s, Foucault’s method investigates its subjects through a bifocal lens; it distinguishes a practice from its assigned purpose, takes only the former as given, and researches the history of alleged purposes of the practice. Careful attention to these material practices will show history to be a battle of interpretations. Foucault writes, “if interpretation is the violent or surreptitious appropriation of a system of rules, which in itself has no essential meaning, in order to impose a direction, to bend it to a new will, to force its participation in a different game, and to subject it to secondary rules, then the development of humanity is a series of interpretations. The role of genealogy is to record its history” (1999: 378). Following Nietzsche, Foucault is suspicious of the idea that a practice maintains a single, continuous meaning throughout history. If he is right to be suspicious, then history pursued properly (as a genealogy does) should investigate the disagreements, alliances, and breaks between the different interpreters of a practice, even when that history reveals an unpleasant narrative to contemporary eyes.

Foucault the genealogist anchors his analysis in practices (or, as Dreyfus and Rabinow put it, “meticulous rituals” (1983: 110)) and the interwoven history of their rival meanings. Foucault investigates practices of punishment in his *Discipline and Punish*. One of his aims in this text is to call into question the seemingly self-evident idea that we have souls, or, as I read him, moral consciences, susceptible to corruption and improvement, that guide our actions. While Foucault hopes to trace the history of the idea of the soul, the materials he investigates are

the practices, procedures, and methods for punishing the body. For Foucault, the correction of the sinful soul is a settled interpretation of what it means to punish, and his explanation is worth quoting at length:

Rather than seeing the soul as the reactivated remnants of an ideology, one would see it as the present correlative of a certain technology of power over the body. It would be wrong to say that the soul is an illusion, or an ideological effect. On the contrary, it exists, it has a reality, it is produced permanently around, on, within the body by the functioning of a power that is exercised on those punished – and in a more general way, on those one supervises, trains and corrects, over madmen, children at home and at school, the colonized, over those who are stuck at a machine and supervised for the rest of their lives (1995: 29).

In other words, Foucault contends that the idea of the soul emerged as a means for exercising control. Rather than being a resurfacing of an older religious form of power, the soul emerged as a means for nineteenth- and twentieth-century European states, in cooperation with churches, prisons, and schools, to render the citizens within their borders docile, obedient, and productive. For Foucault, discipline could be used on bodies only if those bodies were said to have souls in need of correction. The exercise of discipline in correctional environments like the prison (but also in the more general contexts of psychology, education, colonization, and the industrial workplace) carefully and extensively deployed a whole array of disciplinary practices for this purpose. Foucault thinks of discipline as a useful concept for characterizing how modern power works: it is a historically unique strategy for controlling a population that operates through “meticulous rituals.”

For Foucault and Nietzsche, a genealogist attends to the practices or rituals of a concept rather than its alleged purpose. If a genealogist investigates practices or “meticulous rituals,” he must, at the same time, investigate the bodies that carry out those rituals. Foucault writes, concerning punishment, “even if they do not make use of violent or bloody punishment, even when they use ‘lenient’ methods involving confinement or correction, it is always *the body* that is at issue – the body and its forces, their utility and their docility, their distribution and their submission” (1995: 25, my emphasis). Foucault emphasizes here not only how modern disciplinary power has focused on the body, but also how physiological experience is a central category of his investigation. “Violent,” “bloody,” and “lenient,” for Foucault, are descriptions of the ways practices of punishment have dealt with the body of the prisoner. Regardless of whether systems of punishment use torture, solitary confinement, or integrated, open incarceration, in each means of punishing, the body is the matter of concern. Foucault’s genealogy shows with clarity that the body is the site where practices takes place, that the body performs the ritual over which the vying interpretations of history fight. For Foucault, this means bodily experience is indispensable material for genealogical investigation.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Judith Butler is pessimistic in her view of Foucault, and she argues that Foucault’s thinking about the body amounts to a contradiction: if history is “inscribed” on bodies in their practices, and history, properly pursued, is the patient documentation of those embodied practices, then it would seem that a stable, trans-historical body is a precondition of genealogical investigation. For Butler, this corners Foucault: bodies and practices must be entities “outside” of history for genealogy to work. In other words, how could a genealogist disentangle the threads of physiological experience or practices? Indeed, Nietzsche’s division between “permanent” and “fluid” components of a practice in his genealogy commits him to the same problem. Both seem to rely on something trans-historical in order to demonstrate their predecessors were mistaken in relying on trans-historical meaning. See Butler (1989 and 2006: 175-178). Butler offers her own means of addressing the “paradox” of bodily inscription in Foucault in her *Bodies That Matter* (1993: 2). McWhorter challenges Butler’s criticism (1989) by attacking the necessary nature/culture dualism involved in her critique. The most promising route for addressing this problem, in my view, is Maren Wehrle’s integration of Husserlian and Merleau-Pontian phenomenology into a genealogical approach (2015). While a fascinating avenue for future research, the present paper will remain agnostic on this problem.

## 5 CONCLUSION: NIETZSCHE, GENEALOGY, AND PHYSIOLOGICAL EXPERIENCE

What I hope to have clarified in this thesis is the methodological role physiological language plays in Nietzsche's genealogy. It is impossible to do a history of actual, lived practices without directing attention to the bodily experience of those practices. This claim is consistent with, and even buttresses and explains, Nietzsche's persistent use of physiological language in the *Genealogy*. His emphasis on visceral, tangible, physiological experience is central to the genealogical method he develops. If the genealogy of a moral concept is the history of competing interpretations over a practice, then the location of the conflict between interpretations is the body executing those practices. When investigating the vying interpretations of a practice, then, a genealogist must consider the practice *and* the physiological experience of the practice. The bold, leaping physical health of the Mycenaean Greeks Nietzsche reads through Homer is a sign of a previously established system of morality. The physiology of the mythic knightly-aristocrats, their "powerful physicality, [their] blossoming, rich, even overflowing health" (GM I 7), "their indifference and contempt toward all security, body, life, comfort" (GM I 11), belongs to the exuberant, reckless, unthinking morality they "actually lived." The power, richness, and overflowing heedlessness of knightly-aristocratic activity is as essential to Nietzsche's history of morality as the sickness of the priestly caste. That bodily experience is a key component of genealogy shows why Nietzsche connects these physiological reports with his history of morality.

Nietzsche's remarks on the history of memory get to the heart of his methodological inclusion of physiological experience. He famously opens the second treatise of the *Genealogy* by posing a problem: "To breed an animal that is *permitted to promise*—isn't this precisely the paradoxical task nature has set for itself with regard to man?" (GM II 1). Pages later, he asks,

contrasting humans and animals without the capacity for memory, “How does one impress something onto this partly dull, partly scattered momentary understanding, *this forgetfulness in the flesh*, so that it remains present?” (GM II 3). His answer: the primordial “*mnemo-technique*: ‘One burns something in so that it remains in one’s memory: only what does not cease *to give pain* remains in one’s memory’” (GM II 3). Though it is easy to read only Nietzsche’s emphasis on the unpleasant origins of morality from this passage,<sup>6</sup> I argue we should read further. Nietzsche tells us here that physical pain, the agony of a fiery, permanent branding of a body, is the key primordial tool for creating memory. Human memory and history, for Nietzsche and Foucault, have been tied to a visceral physiological experience from the beginning. Vital for Nietzsche is that “something of that terribleness *continues to be felt* with which everywhere on earth one formerly promised, pledged, vowed” (GM II 3). The creation of memory, a necessary element of Nietzsche’s genealogy of Christian morality, is inextricable from the physiological experience of pain. Other genealogical accounts of concepts must also pay attention to the physical experience of their practices.

I aim here to have clarified that embodied experience, as underscored by Nietzsche’s use of physiological language, is a sphere in which genealogical analysis must take place. Genealogy, in investigating the history of conflict over the significance of a practice, must include accounts of the embodied experience of executing or undergoing those practices; physiology is a necessary category of genealogical investigation.

These observations on genealogical method have consequences outside of historical interest in Nietzsche and Foucault’s philosophy. Cornel West’s genealogy of the practice of

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<sup>6</sup> “Ah, reason, seriousness, mastery over the affects, this entire gloomy matter called reflection, all these prerogatives and showpieces of man: how dearly they have been paid for! how much blood and horror there is at the base of all ‘good things!’” (GM II 3).



modern racial discrimination takes up genealogy as a critical tool to investigate and cast light on a pressing modern-day social issue (2002). His example is helpful both for illustrating the stakes of genealogy and for showing the centrality of physiology and embodiment in the method. West, like Nietzsche and Foucault, is suspicious of conventional, inherited histories. He argues that traditional histories of racism and racial discrimination in the US are insufficient. Such histories might run like this: modern American anti-black racism (a historical, ethical aberration of the Enlightenment political tradition) emerged in the nineteenth- and early twentieth-centuries as a result of economic and social-psychological factors (West 2002: 47-50). Plantation owners (both before and after the Civil War) had an economic interest in keeping African slaves and their descendants away from any kind of political power. Racism was a useful means of dividing working-class whites from blacks: this division would block the possibility of solidarity between the two groups and prevent a broader challenge to shared oppressions, like unfair pay and working conditions, inadequate political representation, and other fetters on their autonomy. Moreover, racism gave working-class whites, themselves in a precarious economic situation, the psychological benefit of feeling empowered and significant compared to blacks. Racism, therefore, served these economic and psychological needs.

West finds these conventional histories wanting as explanations. On the one hand, they do not account for certain features of the history of racism: such histories would not explain, for example, racism's presence in states where slavery had been barred, in communities where there was not an economic antagonism between blacks and whites, and its persistence after the abolition of slavery and the establishment of social and labor protections. On the other hand, as histories whose explanations provide grounds for challenging injustices, these conventional narratives point to weak, simplistic, and ineffective means for pursuing justice. West is skeptical,

for example, that racism would vanish after the Communist revolution, or that racism can be purged by rational dialogue and education. While West does not dismiss these conventional narratives, he believes they are insufficient and finds genealogy to offer a more comprehensive analysis that gives grounds for a more effective understanding and, hopefully, confrontation.

West's genealogy does not assume our contemporary understanding of the purpose of racial discrimination to be stable through history, and finds, like Nietzsche's, alternate meanings in the past. Rather than assuming that the practices of racism have carried the same purposes through history (protecting economic exploitation and providing psychological comfort), he switches the order, and investigates what purposes the practice might have carried at different points in history. He investigates the natural historians of the seventeenth- and eighteenth-centuries (2002: 53-57), and argues, in short, that "*classical ideals of beauty, proportion, and moderation regulated the classifying and ranking of groups of human bodies*" (2002: 58). Racism was made possible, in other words, by two surprisingly entangled strands: (1) natural history's compulsion to observe, compare, and classify and (2) the often overlooked biographical fact that many "theoreticians of race and racism were trained as artists and writers" (2002: 58). This iteration of racial discrimination emerged as Europeans explored and colonized the globe, and these earlier taxonomies were guided by aesthetic and natural-historical inquiry – *not* by the need for plantation-owners to segregate their slaves from impoverished whites, or for the latter to gain some psychological security. Only later in history did these phenotypical systems of classification give grounds for discrimination in the oppressive sense.

West's genealogy highlights the significance of physiology and embodied experience in proper genealogical investigation. He includes an excerpt of Carolus Linnaeus, an eighteenth-century Swedish naturalist, distinguishing Europeans and Africans:

European. White, Sanguine, Brawny. Hair abundantly flowing. Eyes blue. Gentle, acute, inventive. Covered with close vestments. Governed by customs.

African. Black, Phlegmatic, Relaxed. Hair black, frizzled. Skin silky. Nose flat. Lips tumid. Women's bosom a matter of modesty. Breasts give milk abundantly. Crafty, indolent. Negligent. Anoints himself with grease. Governed by caprice (2002: 56).

West includes this excerpt as an example of the aesthetic phenotypical taxonomies that natural historians created in the eighteenth century, and to point to the implicit judgments they carried (2002: 56). Notice the affective differences between Europeans and Africans. Besides observations of color and hair, we would hardly recognize any of Linnaeus' descriptions of Europeans as bodily. On the other hand, the terms Linnaeus uses for Africans – phlegmatic, frizzled, silky, tumid, greased, and the attention paid to women's breasts – give his reader no choice but to imagine bodily processes and the touch of fleshy textures. West's genealogy not only gives an account of the entangled threads of racism, but it calls attention to the physiology of the problem. Remarkably absent from the conventional histories of race is the degree to which thinkers like Linnaeus were struck by the bodies they were describing. Economic and psychological histories make no space for the aesthetic *disgust* contained in Linnaeus' encounter with black bodies, and, conversely, the strong, graceful, almost bodiless *beauty* he sees in white bodies.<sup>7</sup> West's genealogy shows not only racism's entanglement in the history of natural sciences and Western conceptions of beauty, but also the present-day stakes. His genealogy "is significant because it not only precludes reductionist treatments of modern racism; it also highlights the cultural and aesthetic impact of the idea of white supremacy on black people. This inquiry accents the fact that everyday life of black people is shaped not only by the exploitative

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<sup>7</sup> For a more developed account of this kind of black aesthetic experience of the self, see George Yancy (2017), especially chapters 2, 3, and 8.

capitalist system of production but also by cultural attitudes and sensibilities” (West 2002: 65). If aesthetic judgment is a tangled strand of racism, then racist oppression can act at the level of the self-perception of modern-day black people. Moreover, challenging racism will now require not only confrontation with economic oppression and psychological investigation, but a sober consideration of seemingly neutral standards of beauty.

Genealogies are more than subversive counter-narratives, and they carry more weight than simple criticisms of conventional histories: they replace those histories as more patient, attentive, and accurate historical accounts. Traditional histories wash over the discontinuity, struggle, and discord of actual lived history. Genealogy does not shy away from unpleasant pasts; it seeks to bear witness and represent those confused, contradicting, painful histories. Instead of chronicling, for example, the progressive march of justice from a bygone era into our own, genealogy attends to the accounts of the lived practices of those who executed or endured that justice (or, as may become apparent, injustice). These accounts must attempt to make sense of the physiological experience of those practices. This attention illuminates countervailing narratives that can show us that our current regimes of understanding are not fixed or necessary.

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