Chapter 5

Two uses of genealogy: Michel Foucault and Bernard Williams

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The notion common to all the work that I have done . . . is that of problematization.
—Michel Foucault, 1984, 'The Concern for Truth'

Michel Foucault's final description of his genealogical and archaeological inquiries in terms of the concept of 'problematization' is, most commentators have found, difficult to comprehend. Was problematization really always at the core of Foucault's analytical ensemble? Or was this merely another one of Foucault's famous backward glances in which he sought to impose a consistency on what was in reality the fragmented history of his various research projects? By taking Foucault at his word, we can open up an investigation of what it might mean to take up genealogy (leaving archaeology to the side on the present occasion) as a form of the history of problematizations. Doing so enables us both to appreciate the precision of Foucault's use of genealogy and to understand how Foucault's precise uses of this analytic-diagnostic tool have perhaps been wrongly conflated with other prominent uses of genealogy.

Taking Foucault at his word when he speaks of the importance of problematization for the full range of his thought enables a much-needed comparative discrimination of (at least) two different uses of genealogy. On the one hand we can discern Foucault's use of genealogy as a project in critical problematization. On the other hand we can discern the more normatively-ambitious uses of genealogy featured in the work of other prominent thinkers, most notably Friedrich Nietzsche and most recently Bernard Williams. There are considerable differences separating Foucault's use of genealogy as a history of problematizations from Nietzsche's and Williams' more normatively ambitious uses of genealogy. Nietzsche and Williams used genealogy as a normatively determinative mode of inquiry which can supposedly settle the question of the value of the practices which we might use genealogy to inquire into. Of course, these two thinkers each used genealogy in very different senses insofar as Nietzsche's genealogy was an attempt to undermine and subvert certain modern moral practices whereas Williams' was an attempt to vindicate and strengthen certain modern moral notions concerning the value of practices of truthfulness.

Although the minimal conclusion that Foucault's genealogy differs from Nietzsche's and Williams' genealogy may not be all that surprising, what is nonetheless revealing is an exploration of the specific terms on which these varying conceptions of genealogy can be differentiated. Such an exploration particularly helps us recognize the complex relationship between genealogy and critique. It is my claim that Foucault's project differs from more normatively ambitious uses of genealogy and that much light is shed on the way in which Foucault used genealogy as a critical apparatus by explicating this difference. Foucault used genealogy to develop a form of critique that did not rely on the traditional normative ambitions which have motivated so much of modern philosophy. Foucault, perhaps a Kantian after all as he himself insisted on more than one occasion, used genealogy to engage in philosophical critique without offering normative judgments.[1] This does not mean that we cannot find political and ethical commitments in Foucault nor that Foucault contradicts himself in holding such commitments. The point is rather that Foucauldian genealogy by itself does not form the basis of normative commitments straightforwardly understood. To the extent that Foucault's genealogies either credit or discredit certain views about what we ought to do, these views were not developed by Foucault in the straightforwardly normative fashion that Williams' vindications and Nietzsche's subversions seem to lend themselves to. And to the extent that Foucault's genealogies are compatible with straightforward normative commitments, it is not the case that genealogy as problematization by itself generates such normative conclusions as they are traditionally understood. And yet there are neither any principled reasons why those who take up genealogy on Foucault's model of problematization could not at the same time hold normative commitments nor any principled reasons why genealogical problematization could not be used in support of certain political and ethical commitments. The point, rather, is that the kind of critical resources which Foucault's genealogy is keyed to are not the kind of traditional normative resources which fuel the projects of Williams, Nietzsche, and so much of modern 'critical' thought.

In this essay, I defend and explore this contrast between these two different senses of genealogy—genealogy as critical problematization and

genealogy as normative evaluation, taking Foucault as representative of the first and Williams as representative of the second, leaving Nietzsche largely to the side on the present occasion. In developing my argument in this way I do not mean to suggest that Nietzsche's use of genealogy is identical to Williams' such that the two are easy substitutes for one another. I focus on Williams rather than Nietzsche for two reasons. First, Williams' claim to the banner of genealogy deserves to be taken more seriously than it has by contemporary scholars already familiar with the work of Foucault and Nietzsche. Second, I find that Williams' use of genealogy exhibits a version of normatively ambitious genealogy that is at least as sophisticated as Nietzsche's usage of genealogy as a form of subversion, although this is a claim which I shall not defend presently.

My strategy here will consist of contrasting Foucault's genealogy as critical problematization from Williams' genealogy as normative vindication in the context of a challenging criticism which is often issued against genealogies: namely, the charge of the genetic fallacy. I shall show that normatively ambitious uses of genealogy too readily commit the genetic fallacy. I shall also show that an interpretation of genealogy in terms of Foucault's own category of critical problematization enables a form of genealogy that does not commit the genetic fallacy. I shall lastly discuss why Foucault's problematizing genealogy is not deprived of effective critical resources by virtue of Foucault's refusal to engage in normatively ambitious projects of vindication and subversion.

Genealogy and the genetic fallacy

One way of understanding the difference between the normative use of genealogy and the problematizing use of genealogy is to focus on a well-known criticism of genealogy: the charge that genealogy commits the genetic fallacy in conflating the past historical development of a practice with the present justification of that practice.[2] Genetic reasoning is, in my opinion, somewhat less fallacious than is commonly presupposed by philosophers who are not inclined to take history very seriously. The impossibly strong claim that practices of logic and justification are rightly conducted without the slightest concern for inquiry into the history and evolution of such practices makes sense only by rigorously denying the counterclaim that justification itself is a temporal process that takes place both within and through time. But despite any misgivings one may have regarding the genetic fallacy itself, it is not difficult to discern some of the ways in which

the charge of the genetic fallacy has at least some purchase on the ambitious normative uses to which Nietzsche and Williams (and others) have put their genealogical inquiries. It is not at all clear that the historical development of our practices can be as strictly determinative of the current justifiability of these practices as Nietzsche and Williams sometimes seem to claim. The important question raised by the charge of the genetic fallacy concerns strong claims that genealogy normatively bears on justification to such a degree that genealogy by itself can determine justifiability. Weaker claims for the mere relevance of genealogical histories to questions of normative assessment are more widely accepted.

Returning to Foucault and Williams, my strategy will be to show that Williams was like Nietzsche in that he tended to deploy genealogy with high normative ambitions and in so doing often risked committing the genetic fallacy. Foucault, on the other hand, had more modest uses in mind in writing his genealogies and so avoided committing the genetic fallacy, though at the same time managed to write books which are still broadly relevant to the important normative practices (e.g., punishment, sexuality, madness) under consideration in those books. Nietzsche attempted to show that the genealogy of the moral system of the will to truth can be used to subvert that morality and many of its central concepts, truth among them.[3] Williams attempted the similar project of showing how the genealogy of certain of our practices connected to the concept of truth can result in a 'vindication' of truth and its values against currently fashionable criticisms.[4] Whether or not one agrees with the very idea that genetic reasoning is fallacious, the charge that genealogy commits the genetic fallacy at the very least can serve to focus our attention on the possibility that Nietzsche and Williams sought to use genealogy for purposes that risk positing an unsettling view of the relation between historical development and normative justification.

Genealogy as normative vindication: Williams

In order to grasp the specific force of genealogy in Williams' work, it is important to first understand the general project of which this genealogy is a part. Williams' *Truth and Truthfulness* is best read as a book that is trying to change the questions we ask of truth. Williams boldly gives up the project of trying to say what truth is, or at least he urges that there is precious little we can say of such matters, and instead opts for a very different inquiry into the value of truth. 'I shall be concerned throughout with what

may summarily be called "the value of truth."[5] That is Williams' primary concern and we ought not lose sight of it.

One way of understanding Williams' project is in terms of the concerns of twentieth-century analytic epistemology. The going consensus these days holds that analytic theories of truth running from Tarski to Davidson teach us that there is very little to say about truth indeed. When asked the philosopher's question, *'what is* truth?' we should simply point to Tarski's T-Sentences: *'P' is true if and only if P.* The idea of the various forms of minimalism and deflationism which take their cues from Tarski is that we should move talk of truth over from the theory of knowledge to the theory of meaning and replace epistemology with semantics. Williams' achievement was to assume these lessons of twentieth-century philosophy of truth and yet still insist that we can do robust philosophical work on truth. Williams allows something like minimalism and deflationism to reign when we face the conceptual question of 'what is truth?' but insists that we need something a great deal more robust if faced with the moral question of 'why value truth?' Many proponents of minimalist theories of truth have taken the lesson of their theories to be that truth by itself is of precious little value since the real aim of belief is not truth so much as it is justification amongst our peers.[6] But, insists Williams, 'Nothing ties minimalism to an instrumentalist view of the value of truth.'[7]

Williams notes that his question about the value of truth is really Nietzsche's question: 'The problems that concern this book were discovered, effectively, by Nietzsche.'[8] It is rarely remarked that Williams had in fact long been taken by Nietzsche's question—while he did not deal with this question in detail until his 2002 book he registered his interest in the problem as early as 1981 in a little-read review essay where he stated that Nietzsche helps us bring into focus the particular 'demands' of 'truth and truthfulness' and then went on to boast that 'Nietzsche was the greatest moral philosopher of the past century.'[9] According to Maudemarie Clark, moreover, Williams personally conveyed to her that he had been planning a book on Nietzsche as early as the 1970s.[10] All of this provides a warrant for reading Williams' work on truth as motivated by Nietzsche's questions about truth. The questions posed by Nietzsche bring to life a whole new domain of problems that enables a different kind of philosophically informative work on truth. In his deft combination of Nietzsche's provocative questions with the rigorous skepticism of twentieth-century analytic epistemology, Williams fashioned an impressive combination of epistemological minimalism plus moral seriousness about truth.

It is through this combination of epistemological minimalism and moral robustness that Williams invokes his central distinction between truth and truthfulness. Truth, for Williams, remains a minimal semantic concept about which we can say precious little. This concept has no history: truth is what truth is, not what truth does. Williams admits that there are histories of theories of truth. But the concept itself? No history there. Once you get the concept right you will see that truth (that is, the correct theory of minimalist truth) is the sort of thing that 'is not culturally various, but always and everywhere the same.'[11] Truthfulness, by contrast, is something whose history is rich and varied. There are all kinds of different odd ways of being truthful, of telling the truth, and of speaking truthfully. Different forms of truthfulness have a history, but truth itself does not. Truth remains a metaphysically and epistemologically minimal notion about which we can say very little while truthfulness reveals the moral richness of truth. The purpose of distinguishing truth from truthfulness in this way is to bring into view a series of questions concerning the moral status of truth which have been occluded by more classical quests for a definition of truth.

To inquire into the moral value of truth Williams undertakes a series of genealogies of truthfulness. These genealogies, says Williams, will be a 'vindicatory' history in that they will enable us to see 'why truthfulness has an intrinsic value; why it can be seen as such with a good conscience; why a good conscience is a good thing with which to see it.'[12] In Williams' hands, then, genealogy takes the form of an inquiry into various forms of truthfulness. Specifically, he offers rich and illustrative chapters on the history of telling the truth about the past, about oneself, and about one's society.[13]

At the end of these genealogies, as instructive and engaging as they are, Williams still must squarely face a question that will motivate some critics to charge that he has committed the genetic fallacy. Their suspicions might run like this: 'And so what if truthfulness has the history you tell us it does; that does not show that these practices of truthfulness actually emerge vindicated from your tale.' I am not sure how Williams saw himself around such suspicions. Richard Rorty expresses puzzlement about such matters when he notes that, 'I had trouble seeing the continuity between the first half and the second half of Williams' book; the connections between the more philosophical part and the more historical part are not perspicuous.'[14] Clearly Williams took truth to be more than just truthfulness, and for him a moral philosophy of timeless truth is not exactly identical to a genealogical history of truthfulness. Yet just as clearly Williams took his genealogy of truthfulness to somehow vindicate the value of truth. Is this sloppy slippage or ingenious integration?

A great deal in Williams' account seems to turn on the particular kind of vindication for truth that he seems to have in mind. When Williams sets out to vindicate the value of truth, he sets out specifically to vindicate truth as 'intrinsically' valuable. Williams wants to vindicate truth by showing it to be something worthy of 'respect' and this means showing it to be intrinsically valuable.[15] This point helps us grasp one rather important implication of Williams' insistence that the concept of truth itself has no history. If truth has no history, then it is at least minimally plausible for Williams to claim that truth is intrinsically valuable. But if truth has a history, then it would seem flatly incoherent to claim that truth itself is intrinsically valuable. Historically variable moralities of truthfulness might have a value, but such value could only be instrumental. What these values might help us appreciate, however, is the greater intrinsic value of something that does not vary with history, namely the concept of truth itself.

I detect a sensible presumption in Williams' approach to the effect that if something is intrinsically valuable then it cannot be subject to the contingencies of historical evolution. Williams thus reserves truth as something capable of possessing intrinsic value by insisting that the concept of truth has no history. This presumption might be seen as a response to a concern that has *always* pursued genealogists going back to the very first genealogist: no, not Nietzsche, but Darwin, or perhaps even earlier, maybe Hume. Consider Darwin's genealogy, which raises the following problem. If *homo sapiens* is the contingent product of a long process of unplanned evolution, then we are not pristine in the timeless image of the holy. If so, Darwin's critics worried, then humanity is stripped of its intrinsic dignity, goodness, and value. Whatever value we do have, we did not *have* to have it, but things just so happened to work out that way. With this, the nineteenth-century culture wars were underway. Similar battles were brewing back in Hume's day too. Contemporary debates about Truth can be seen as an analogue of these old debates about Man, Reason, and Nature. Some contemporary thinkers, Rorty among them, find a Darwinian version of the message about truth an uplifting one because it suggests that our values are our achievements, and so we can do what we need to in order to improve upon them.[16] Other contemporary thinkers, Williams perhaps among them, find parts of the message problematic because they believe that in order to be really valuable, valuable all by itself, truth must stand outside of history as an impermeable reality whose value speaks for itself. These contemporary debates clearly recapitulate some of the most crucial intellectual clashes that emerged in Darwin's wake in the latter decades of the nineteenth century. Take the debate between William James and Charles Peirce over

truth. James, like Rorty, thought of the value of truth as constructed by and amongst we humans, but no less worthy for it. The achievement that we call truth is a grand achievement, and it is our achievement. Peirce, like Williams, thought that in order to be really valuable truth must stand on its own outside of the contingencies of human evolution. Peirce wrote to James in 1902: 'No doubt truth has to have defenders to uphold it. But truth creates its defenders and gives them strength.'[17] The more Jamesian Rorty thought that if we take care of freedom then we will be free enough to take care of truth. The more Peircean Williams thought that taking care of freedom means taking care of truth first.

Despite the usual concerns one might have about Williams' readiness to invoke such properties as 'intrinsically valuable' and 'timelessly ahistorical' one can still admire the coherence of his account and the sense in which everything neatly hangs together. Williams was right to insist that truth can be intrinsically valuable only if it is ahistorical. One of his achievements was to suggest that we can combine these ideas with a minimalist conception of truth and a genealogical explanation of truthfulness. We might object to the whole package, but we should not deny Williams' achievement in having shown us just how well all these things can be packaged together.

Rorty was among those who objected to the whole package. It remains a measure of the long distances which separated the two thinkers that Rorty could never have made sense of Williams' two crucial ideas that truth has intrinsic value and that it has no history.[18] But Williams and Rorty would have agreed that historical investigations of various forms of truthfulness are where all the most important work in a moral philosophy of truth will get done. Williams' version of this idea is that such historical investigations help us approach truth itself and whatever intrinsic value we can glimpse of it. This is because genealogical inquiries can help us understand the specific historical content which fills out an otherwise empty ahistorical concept of truth. Williams writes, '[I]n many cases the content of our concepts is a contingent historical phenomenon . . . The forms of these dispositions and of the motivations they embody are culturally and historically various.'[19] Williams' view is thus that we can use philosophical reflection to discern 'the necessary, structural features' of truth, but that 'philosophy needs to make room for history' when we turn toward 'specific cultural determinations' of truthfulness.[20] These are the two halves of Williams' enterprise between which Rorty can find no clear connection. The admittedly vague answer which Williams seems to offer to the challenge posed by Rorty seems to be that philosophical reflection provides us with a minimal

outline of an ahistorical concept of truth such that genealogical reflection can then go on to provide us with the historical details that fill in this thin concept with rather much thicker content: 'General reflection can show that something has to support the disposition . . . But what particular range of values in a given cultural situation will perform this role is a matter of real history.'[21] It is in this sense that Williams' project on the whole is meant to offer a vindication (a real vindication and not just an ethnocentric paean) of truth as intrinsically valuable. While we could perhaps do without this or that particular form of truthfulness, the genealogy is supposed to show us that the collective effect of all these forms of truthfulness is to impress upon us that surely we could not do without any kind of truthfulness at all. Even if we could get by without telling the truth about the past or telling the truth about ourselves, we would still need some forms of truthfulness in our lives in order to get by at all. It is in this sense that an ahistorical concept of truth is intrinsically valuable, always and everywhere, even though the contingent determinations informing this necessary value shift according to the historical exigencies of different practices of truthfulness which impress us around here and just now.

It is time to confess that I am among those who do not buy Williams' story about intrinsic value and a concept of truth that is beyond history. I regard Williams' work as an ingenious, but ultimately unsuccessful, attempt to get a great deal of normative mileage out of a method or analytic of inquiry that is better reserved for elucidation, explication, and intensification. Like Williams, Nietzsche thought that he could use genealogy to seal some fairly controversial conclusions about modern morality. Williams vindicated— Nietzsche subverted. But no matter what one wants to prove about the situations in which one finds oneself, one should not use genealogy to try to *prove* anything about the present, other than that the present need not be the way that it is.

Williams' genealogies of the moralities of truthfulness are rich, impressive, and learned. But his supposed vindication of truth is puzzling. Williams himself would have realized the obvious danger involved in using genealogy to vindicate anything. Aware of his proximity to the genetic fallacy, I see Williams as having backed into a nongenealogical account of truth as an ahistorical concept. This certainly helps along his vindicatory story about truth, albeit not on genealogical grounds and definitely not on uncontroversial grounds. Leaving the controversies over truth to the side, my point is that what does the vindicating in Williams' account may not be the genealogy after all, but rather the philosophical reflections on truth. All the real normative mileage is being run not by the genealogical components in Williams' work but by the philosophical components which stipulate a formal theory of truth and then through armchair reflection attempt to show how this formal concept is intrinsically valuable. A central part of Williams' genealogy is the first more philosophical half of the book in which he offers armchair musings on why a very minimal concept of truth may be taken to be intrinsically valuable to any form of human social life.[22] Williams calls this an 'imaginary genealogy' and it is meant to provide the essential outline of a story about the value of truth which a real 'historical genealogy' then comes along to fill out in the second more historical part of the book. But it is not clear why this armchair reflection is a genealogy at all in that it seems more in keeping with the traditional philosophical technique of a thought experiment. As for the real historical genealogies, these show us at best why truth might have been taken to be valuable at some point in our history. But they could not be used to show that truth is intrinsically valuable nor could they be used to show that truth has no history. I agree with Ian Hacking who urges that, 'It is better to play down the "intrinsic." '[23] Those aspects of Williams' vindicatory story in which he plays up the 'intrinsic' and the 'ahistorical' are, almost by definition it seems, not genealogical. That may be to the advantage or disadvantage of genealogy. But it would surely be a disadvantage to pretend that the vindicatory thought experiments are genealogical when, truthfully, they are not.

Insofar as Williams explicitly oriented his conception of genealogy toward normatively rather ambitious purposes, he failed to fully explicate the senses in which his genealogies might be useful for quite different purposes of social-scientific and humanistic explication and problematization. And surely it is the case that his genealogies are indeed useful for these purposes. The best chapters of Williams' book offer edifying intellectual histories of different practices of truth-telling. Here are important episodes in the history of truthfulness, a history which Williams has shown us ought to be taken very seriously indeed. But if we are interested in theoretically exploring the ways in which such genealogical histories can be used to explicate our contemporary practices of truthfulness and intensify the problematizations constitutive of those practices, we would do well to turn away from Williams and his theoretical remarks about intrinsic value and ahistorical truth so that we may turn toward some other genealogist whose work offers an explicit engagement with such theoretical explorations. Perhaps now is the time to take up Foucault again.

Genealogy as critical problematization: Foucault

Foucault was well aware of the problems facing any normatively ambitious use of genealogy such as that featured in the work of Williams or Nietzsche. This was made especially evident when he came in his later years to describe his own historical research through the lens of the concept of problematization. The point of problematization for Foucault was not, as per Nietzsche, to use history to subvert some of our most central modern practices. The point was rather to use history to show the way in which certain practices have structured some of the core problematics which a given period of thought, most notably our own modernity, must face. In Nietzsche's hands, genealogy was used as a global critique of the modern moral system, the effect of which was to simply clear the board of our existing moral conceptions. In Foucault's hands, genealogy was used as part of a local critique of some of our moral practices, the effect of which was to problematize these practices in a way that showed their need for future revision. Nietzsche cleared the board while Foucault pointed out problems on the board of which we were not formerly aware but which he thought could only be addressed from within the limits of the board. In comparing Foucault and Williams, the same sorts of observations apply insofar as Williams used genealogy to vindicate the current setup of the board which equally prevents us from rigorously questioning the problems implicit in the setup in the first place.

Despite his having been severely and widely misread in these regards,[24] genealogy as practiced in Foucault's more cautious sense is indeed evident in many of his works. In *The Use of Pleasure* and *The Care of The Self*, Foucault uses problematization neither to undermine nor to vindicate ancient ethical practices, but to show the way in which certain features of these practices were understood as the primary problems which these practices were made to address.[25] A similar reading of problematization is also the best way to make sense of Foucault's earlier genealogies of punishment and sexuality in *Discipline and Punish* and *The Will to Know* (volume 1 of *The History of Sexuality*).[26] Here Foucault's strategy is not that of undermining modern notions of power and freedom (as these are exemplified in punitive and sexual practices). Rather, Foucault uses genealogy to clarify the way in which these practices have themselves problematized certain assumptions about power and freedom which have tended to persist. Modern punishment and sexuality do not demonstrate that repressive theories of power and emancipatory theories of freedom are wrong or bad, they show rather that for we moderns power and freedom have precisely become the

problematic field on which we are most earnestly focused. Power as discipline and freedom as liberation are not delegitimated by Foucault, but are rather shown to be the most critical problematic on which we moderns find ourselves obsessively working. Foucault's use of genealogy as a means of clarifying and intensifying this problematic or problematization is however not incompatible with attempts to destabilize practices of discipline and liberation. The point rather is that genealogical problematization by itself neither legitimates nor deligitimates. Genealogical problematization instead helps us recognize that constitutive practices such as these form fields in need of further work.

Although it would be useful to revisit Foucault's major genealogical treatises with this revised conception of the critical role of genealogy in mind, it is outside of the scope of this paper to exhaustively engage these complex texts.[27] A quicker way of putting my interpretation to the test is to compare it to Foucault's own observations about genealogy as a practice of problematization. For the sake of orientation, I will begin with a summary overview of Foucault's concept of problematization and then move on to unpacking this summary on the basis of his varied writings about problematization.

Problematization as Foucault practiced it can be seen as a form of inquiry with two aspects. A first aspect is a genealogical inquiry into the emergence and descent of certain problems and their corollary conceptions of what might count as a solution. A second aspect concerns the way in which such inquiry functions to clarify and intensify the hybrid network of problems and solutions inquired into. Inquiry in the form of problematization is preceded by the problems which are the objects of its study, but by studying their emergence the problematizing form of inquiry is able to open these problems up to more rigorous forms of critical scrutiny. By inquiring into the emergence of hybrid networks of problems and solutions, genealogy enables us to recognize our problems as contingent products rather than as necessary givens. By clarifying and intensifying these hybrid networks, genealogy also enables us to adopt a more reflective relation to the problems in which we already find ourselves, whether consciously or not, enmeshed. In sum, problematization functions to both open up problems in their emergence and to make them available for critical scrutiny.

This dual-aspect description of genealogical problematization can be discerned in many of Foucault's own writings and conversations about problematization. But the first thing to note is Foucault's own claims for the importance of problematization for all of his work. In a manner somewhat

typical of his intellectual tendencies, Foucault came to describe all of his work under the rubric of problematization:

> The notion common to all the work that I have done since *History of Madness* is that of problematization, though it must be said that I never isolated this notion sufficiently . . . In *History of Madness* the question was how and why, at a given moment, madness was problematised through a certain institutional practice and a certain apparatus of knowledge. Similarly, in *Discipline and Punish* I was trying to analyze the changes in the problematization of the relations between crime and punishment through penal practices and penitentiary institutions in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.[28]

Regardless of the accuracy of this self-description, what it does definitively establish is the great importance of the notion of problematization in Foucault's thinking about *all* of his work in his final years.

In an interview with Paul Rabinow and Hubert Dreyfus, Foucault was asked if his histories of ancient thought were intended to revive a golden age of ethics which might be a plausible substitute for our current moral practices. Foucault's emphatic response apparently demanded an exclamatory emphasis when transcribed into a written text: 'No!' Foucault then used this question as an opportunity to specify the way in which he saw his historical research functioning: 'I would like to do the genealogy of problems, of *problématiques*. My point is not that everything is bad, but that everything is dangerous, which is not exactly the same as bad. If everything is dangerous, then we always have something to do.'[29] Foucault was always more interested in posing challenging questions than in definitively solving problems. Showing a practice to be good or bad is ultimately a way of solving problems rather than provoking them. This explains why Foucault vigilantly avoided the 'blackmail' of being ' "for" or "against" ' modern regimes of truth.[30]

Foucault was clear about this in many of his reflections on his use of genealogy. Sometimes he merely mentioned this point casually in the context of other discussions: '[W]hat I have been trying to do this evening is not to solve a problem but to suggest a way to approach a problem.'[31] At other times, most often in interviews, he was careful to establish this point in a more rigorous fashion. In the lengthy interview with Trombadori:

> My role is to raise questions in an effective, genuine way, and to raise them with the greatest possible rigor, with the maximum complexity and

difficulty so that a solution doesn't spring from the head of some reformist intellectual or suddenly appear in the head of a party's political bureau. The problems I try to pose—those tangled things that crime, madness, and sex are, and that concern every life—cannot easily be resolved.[32]

In another interview with Rabinow:

> My attitude isn't a result of the form of critique that claims to be a methodical examination in order to reject all possible solutions except for the one valid one. It is more on the order of 'problematization'— which is to say, the development of a domain of acts, practices, and thoughts that seem to me to pose problems for politics.[33]

Lastly, consider this line from the essay on methodology published as the 'Introduction' to the second volume of *The History of Sexuality* project: 'The proper task of a history of thought is: to define the conditions in which human beings "problematize" what they are, what they do, and the world in which they live.'[34]

These many methodological reflections on problematization suggest that the point of Foucault's genealogies was to neither subvert nor vindicate existing practices, beliefs, and conceptions. Rather, it was to critically show the way in which certain practices, beliefs, and conceptions have become problematic in the history of thought due to the contingent intersection of a complex set of enabling or disabling conditions. To say that practices are problematic is not to insist that they are wrong. It is to insist that they constitute a field on which we find that we must continue to work. Foucault is saying, for example, that we must concern ourselves with the problematic relations between modern power and modern freedom, for example between the powers which we at times unthinkingly use to regulate sexual practices and the freedoms which we attribute to certain supposedly liberating sexual practices. Genealogy taken in this sense is an initiating, rather than a concluding, phase of thought. Genealogy brings into critical focus the problems which further critical work must attempt to develop solutions for. Genealogy seeks out the limits that condition our possibilities for being, acting, and thinking in the present. In this sense Foucault is, as Ian Hacking has noted, 'a remarkably able Kantian.'[35]

A Kantian more invested in the analytic and diagnostic explication of the conditions of the possibility of the present than he was in the traditional philosophical practice of issuing specific judgments in metaphysics

and morality, Foucault's thought tracks a quite different orbit than that described by Williams' genealogy and Nietzsche's too, for that matter. While the normative ambitions characteristic of Williams' and Nietzsche's deployments of genealogy risk committing the genetic fallacy, we should not move too quickly in generalizing this point to Foucault. Foucault's more modest deployment of genealogy is not subject to any traditional form of the charge of the genetic fallacy insofar as it refuses to enlist genealogy in a project of normative justification.

This point is important not in the least because Foucault has been amply, severely, and repeatedly criticized precisely along these lines by a number of prominent commentators. Perhaps one of the most cogent arguments to the effect that Foucault commits the genetic fallacy was offered by Nancy Fraser. Fraser's criticism of Foucault is based on an interpretation of Foucault's use of genealogy according to which the genealogist deploys carefully-developed empirical insights which in combination with some minimal set of other relevant considerations are supposed to establish the normative conclusion that certain of our practices are bad or unjust. Foucault is supposed to commit the genetic fallacy insofar as he uses empirical insights to establish normative conclusions. But, says Fraser, Foucault's work yields normative confusions rather than normative conclusions.[36]

This criticism misses the point that Foucault did not use genealogy in order to normatively evaluate the present practices whose histories he was writing. He rather used genealogy in order to clarify and intensify the dangers of the present whose histories he studied. The best way of defending Foucault against Fraser's criticism is to provisionally concede her admittedly controversial premise that genetic reasoning is fallacious in order to then go on and refute her other premise which asserts that Foucault's genealogies exemplify genetic reasoning of precisely this objectionable kind.[37] Foucault, in other words, did not use genealogy in order to definitively establish normative conclusions about the practices he was investigating. Yet it is precisely this attempt to establish normative conclusions on the basis of descriptive claims about the historical evolution of practices that critics such as Fraser find objectionable in genetic reasoning.

Many devotees of Foucauldian genealogy are likely to find my defense here to cede too much ground to Fraser. Fraser's claim, after all, was that Foucault is full of 'empirical insights' but also rife with 'normative confusions' or what Habermas would later call 'crypto-normativism.'[38] Is this not the sort of view I am retreating to? Not quite. I am not conceding Fraser's claim that Foucault's work is objectionable due to its being normatively

confused. Foucault's work, as I see it, was just not straightforwardly normative in the sense that Fraser's argument requires, and that is why Foucault does not commit the genetic fallacy.

Two observations are relevant at this point. First, my defense of Foucault against Fraser does not require us to regard his work as incompatible with normative evaluation. Second, my defense also does not require us to regard Foucault's work as critically ineffective even if it is not as normatively ambitious as Williams' and Nietzsche's work. While genealogy is not itself normative, it can nonetheless be critically engaged in and broadly relevant to forms of inquiry involved in the normative evaluation of practices. Genealogy remains relevant to evaluation just insofar as the clarification of the historical development of particular problems is not entirely irrelevant to present inquiries aiming to resolve these very problems we now find ourselves in the midst of. Indeed there is all the reason to think that the genealogical project of developing a historical critique of the present (in Kant's sense of critique) provides many of the tools we would need to even set about the project of normatively engaging ourselves in the present.

The contrast to Williams helps us recognize that Foucault's genealogy properly understood as problematization is not an exercise in legitimation and delegitimation. It also helps us recognize the sense in which Foucault's critics too often attack his genealogies on a level where they never operated. Foucauldian genealogy is an exercise in clarifying and intensifying the problematizations which condition the ways in which we constitute ourselves in the present. Genealogy as problematization does not seek to establish normative conclusions to the effect that certain practices are either good or bad, either just or unjust, either valid or corrupt. Genealogy as problematization only aims to provide us with materials which we will need if we are to engage in the difficult practice of reconstructing ourselves. These materials for self-transformation, according to Foucault, are what a genealogy seeks to recover in locating the precise practices and procedures which have contributed to our current forms of constituting ourselves. The ultimate goal of genealogy as such is an explication and conceptualization of a complex set of practices that have contingently coalesced. This can be described as an analytical and diagnostic project. The genealogist analyzes and diagnoses practices in a way that reveals the problematizations enabling them. It is these problematizations that crucially condition our possibilities for acting, thinking, and being in the present. It is on the basis of these problematizations—the constraints and limits which they establish—that we continually fashion and refashion ourselves. By rereading genealogy (and perhaps also archaeology though I have not

dealt with this here)[39] in light of this conception of problematization, as Foucault himself suggested we should, we can come to an understanding of how genealogy can gain critical purchase without being put forward as a straightforward normative project of legitimation or delegitimation. We are today, once again, in want of such a practice of critique.[40]

Notes

1. For self-descriptions as a Kantian see Michel Foucault, 'What is Enlightenment?' Paul Rabinow, ed. (1997), *Essential Works, Volume 1: Ethics, Subjectivity, and Truth*. New York: The New Press, and 'Foucault, Michel, 1926—,' Gary Gutting (1984), ed. *The Cambridge Companion to Foucault*. Cambridge: Cambridge University.

2. For a classic, possibly the first statement of the genetic fallacy, see Morris Cohen and Ernest Nagel (1934), *An Introduction to Logic and Scientific Method*. New York: Harcourt. For more recent probing see Margaret Crouch (1993), 'A "Limited" Defense of the Genetic Fallacy,' *Metaphilosophy* 24, no. 3, Jul, 1993, and Kevin Klement (2002), 'When Is Genetic Reasoning Not Fallacious?' *Argumentation* 16, no. 4, Dec., 2002.

3. Nietzsche, Friedrich (1994), *On the Genealogy of Morals*, Carol Diethe, trans. Cambridge: Cambridge University. On the genetic fallacy in Nietzsche see Alexander Nehamas (1985), *Nietzsche: Life as Literature*. Cambridge: Harvard University, 107ff., and David Hoy (1986), 'Nietzsche, Hume, and the Genealogical Method,' Yovel, ed., *Nietzsche as Affirmative Thinker*. Dordrecht: Martinus Nijhoff, 20–38. For one of the best criticisms of Nietzsche along these general lines see Alasdair MacIntyre (1990), *Three Rival Versions of Moral Enquiry: Encyclopedia, Genealogy, and Tradition*. Notre Dame: Notre Dame University. For a defense of Nietzsche see Paul Loeb (1995), 'Is There a Genetic Fallacy in Nietzsche's Genealogy of Morals?' *International Studies in Philosophy* 27, no. 3.

4. Williams, Bernard (2002), *Truth and Truthfulness: An Essay in Genealogy*. Princeton: Princeton University.

5. Ibid., 6.

6. See Richard Rorty (1998), 'Is Truth a Goal of Inquiry? Donald Davidson versus Crispin Wright,' Richard Rorty (1998), *Truth and Progress: Philosophical Papers Volume 3*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

7. Williams, *Truth*, 66; see also Barry Allen (2003), 'Another New Nietzsche,' *History and Theory* 42, Oct., 2003, 373.

8. Ibid., 12.

9. Williams, Bernard (1981), 'Nietzsche's Centaur,' *London Review of Books*, June 17, 1981, 17.

10. Maudemarie, Clark (2001), 'On the Rejection of Morality: Bernard Williams' Debt to Nietzsche,' Richard Schacht (2001), ed., *Nietzsche's Postmoralism*. Cambridge: Cambridge University, 120, note 3.

11. Williams, *Truth*, 61.

12. Ibid., 36, 263.

13. See chapters 7, 8, and 9 of Williams, *Truth*. The genealogy of liberal social critique (Chapter 9) is the least developed, but for a fuller account see Bernard Williams (2005), *In the Beginning Was the Deed: Realism and Moralism in Political Argument*. Princeton: Princeton University. Williams' book is actually more complex. In chapter 3 he offers an entirely different genealogy of the origins of truthfulness itself. Unlike the later historical genealogies, Williams offers this early account as an explicitly 'fictional' genealogy. It is not clear that armchair-thought experiments are really genealogies at all. I leave imaginary genealogies to the side, but Edward Craig considers at length the complex relationship between historical genealogies and fictional state of nature stories in Williams. See Edward Craig (2007), 'Genealogies and the State of Nature,' Alan Thomas (2007), ed., *Bernard Williams*. Cambridge: Cambridge University.

14. Rorty, Richard (2002), 'To the Sunlit Uplands,' *London Review of Books*, Oct. 31, 2002. Available online at http://www.lrb.co.uk/v24/n21/print/rort01_.html; see also Allen, 'Another Nietzsche', 375.

15. Williams, *Truth*, 38, 58, 92, 11.

16. See Richard Rorty, 'Dewey Between Hegel and Darwin' in Rorty, Richard (1998), *Truth and Progress: Philosophical Papers Volume 3*. Cambridge: Cambridge University.

17. Peirce to James, June 12, 1902, as quoted in Ralph Barton Perry (1996), *The Thought and Character of William James*. Nashville: Vanderbilt University, 286.

18. On Williams and Rorty see Hilary Putnam (2004), *Ethics without Ontology*. Harvard: Harvard University.

19. Williams, Bernard (2006), 'Philosophy as a Humanistic Discipline,' *Philosophy as a Humanistic Discipline*. Princeton: Princeton University, 192.

20. Williams, *Truth*, 93

21. Ibid.

22. Ibid., Chapter 3.

23. Hacking, Ian (2004), 'Critical Notice of *Truth and Truthfulness*,' *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* 34, no. 1, Mar., 2004, 147. See also Allen, 'Another Nietzsche' agreeing with Hacking and contrast Craig, 'Genealogies' arguing that the specific advantage of Williams' genealogy is that it enables us to explicate the elusive connection between instrumental and intrinsic value.

24. See Jürgen Habermas (1987), *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*, Frederick Lawrence, trans. Cambridge: MIT Press.

25. Foucault, Michel (1990), *The Use of Pleasure: The History of Sexuality, Volume 2*, Robert Hurley, trans. New York: Vintage, and Michel Foucault (1988), *The Care of the Self: The History of Sexuality, Volume 3*, Robert Hurley, trans. New York: Vintage.

26. Foucault, Michel (1995), *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, Alan Sheridan, trans. New York: Vintage, and Michel Foucault (1990), *The History of Sexuality, Volume 1: An Introduction*, Robert Hurley, trans. New York: Vintage.

27. I describe *Discipline and Punish* and *History of Madness* in these terms in Colin Koopman, 'Revising Foucault', forthcoming in *Philosophy & Social Criticism*.

28. Foucault, Michel (1990), 'The Concern for Truth,' Lawrence Kritzman (1990), ed., *Politics, Philosophy, Culture*. New York: Routledge, 257.

29. Foucault, Michel (1997), 'On the Genealogy of Ethics: Overview of Work in Progress,' interview by Rabinow and Dreyfus, in Paul Rabinow (1997), ed., *Essential Works, Volume 1: Ethics, Subjectivity, and Truth*. New York: The New Press, 256.

30 Foucault, 'What is Enlightenment?', 312–313.

31 Foucault, Michel (2000), ' "Omnes et Singulatim": Toward a Critique of Political Reason,' James Faubion (2000), ed., *Essential Works, Volume 3: Power*. New York: The New Press, 311.

32 Foucault, Michel (2000), 'Interview with Michel Foucault' by D. Trombadori, in James Faubion (2000) ed., *Essential Works, Volume 3: Power*, 288.

33 Foucault, Michel (1997), 'Polemics, Politics and Problematizations', interview by Rabinow, in Paul Rabinow (1997), ed., *Essential Works, Volume 1: Ethics, Subjectivity, and Truth*. New York: The New Press, 114.

34 Foucault, *Care of the Self*, 10

35 Hacking, Ian (1984), 'Self-Improvement' in David Hoy, ed., *Foucault: A Critical Reader*. New York: Blackwell, 238. For recent revisionist work on the importance of Kant for Foucault, see Amy Allen (2008), *The Politics of Our Selves: Power, Autonomy, and Gender in Contemporary Critical Theory*. New York: Columbia. Allen's book corrects the defects of the reading of Foucault as a Kantian offered in early literature, most notably in Béatrice Han (2002), *Foucault's Critical Project: Between the Transcendental and the Historical*, Edward Pile, trans. Stanford: Stanford University.

36 See Nancy Fraser (1989), 'Foucault on Modern Power: Empirical Insights and Normative Confusions' and 'Michel Foucault: A Young Conservative?' in Nancy Fraser (1989), *Unruly Practices: Power, Discourse and Gender in Contemporary Social Theory*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

37 Amy Allen offers a different approach by accepting Fraser's premise that Foucault used genealogy to develop genetic evaluations and refusing Fraser's premise that genetic reason is fallacious; see Allen's forthcoming paper, 'Foucault, Autonomy, and the Genetic Fallacy.'

38 Fraser, 'Foucault on Modern Power' and Habermas, *Philosophical Discourse*.

39 I describe the compatibility of archaeology and genealogy in Foucault's general analytic-diagnostic orientation of problematization in Colin Koopman (2008), 'Adding Genealogy to Archaeology,' *Journal of the Philosophy of History* 2, no. 3.

40 For their comments on earlier versions of this paper I thank Ryan Acton, Barry Allen, and Christoph Durt. For helpful discussions of Williams and Foucault I would like to thank Amy Allen, Ian Hacking, Hans Sluga, and especially David Hoy. For important questions in response to a presentation of this material at the Eighth Annual Meeting of the Foucault Circle, I thank Dianna Taylor. Lastly, I acknowledge a Postdoctoral Research Grant from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, which provided me with the resources to research and write this paper.

Chapter 6

Weakening ontology through actuality: Foucault and Vattimo

Santiago Zabala

But what therefore is philosophy today—I mean philosophical activity—if it is not the critical work of thought on itself? And if it does not consist in undertaking to know how and to what extent it would be possible to think differently, instead of legitimating what one already knows?

—*Michel Foucault, L'Usage des plaisirs, 1984*

When authors become classic figures it is not simply because of their originality but rather because of the influence, consequences, and effects of their work. Contrary to what most think, these influences are not particularly evident in the direct disciples of an author but rather in those readers who do not necessarily pursue the intuitions of the classic authors faithfully. One can see Martin Heidegger's influence over Paul Ricoeur, Jacques Derrida, and Richard Rorty much more clearly than his sway over his own students, Hannah Arendt, Hans-Georg Gadamer, and Ernst Tugendhat. While Heidegger's disciples pursued their master's works one way or another, the other philosophers only responded to some particular conception or idea in Heidegger's work and therefore employed them in a much more circumscribed way. A collection of essays on the influences, consequences, or effects of a classic author is not only an occasion to evaluate once again his significance but most of all to specify how his thought affected others.

Foucault's influence on the Italian philosopher Gianni Vattimo is much more significant than one might expect. It can be found in Vattimo's recent and forthcoming works more so than his older ones, but most important, indispensable for understanding his fundamental philosophical task: weakening ontology through actuality. While Vattimo's books on Nietzsche, Heidegger, postmodernity, and religion are not straightforwardly

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