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Genealogy as a Hermeneutics of Religions



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Abstract:
The main aim of this paper is to analyse the applications of Nietzschean genealogical method to the study of religions. We focus firstly on Nietzsche's basic concepts: force, will to power, value, evaluation, and power and then go on to discuss some genealogical investigations of the religious phenomena. According to Nietzsche, the nihilist structure of European history is metaphysics itself, understood as Platonism, otherwise explained as a separation between "the real world" (of values and ideals) and the "apparent world" (of sensitive things). With the help of genealogy, values and ideals are proven to be illusions or appearances; on the contrary, senses and instincts, feelings and affections are rehabilitated. In this way, Nietzsche discovers the finitude of man and reveals the original unity between body and value, between what is given to man and what he can do alone.

Key words:
genealogical method, Nietzsche, the hermeneutics of suspicion, interpretation, history of religions, hermeneutics of religions, nihilism

The Hermeneutics of Suspicion and the History of Religions

Philosophical approaches have often been decisive in the study of religions, imparting to this discipline not only a theoretical basis, but also the direction in which research should proceed. During the last two centuries, every important philosophical orientation has left its imprint on the investigation specific to this field. Neo-Kantianism and Neo-Hegelianism, the philosophy of life and pragmatism, psychoanalysis and marxism, phenomenology and hermeneutics, structuralism and deconstructivism, cognitivism and analytical philosophy have all bestowed their own style on the history and science of religions.

Taking Mircea Eliade as an example, one can ascertain that his approach does not eschew some methods and thinking styles which were very influential in the 20th century philosophy. Approaching religious phenomena at their own "scale", with the purpose of understanding their essence, educing religious structures (called archetypes), investigating the history of phenomena, of cultural conditionings and existential situations that favoured their coming into being and, last but not least, "integral" hermeneutics called into play by the historian of religions – all these methodological coordinates are tightly connected to various contemporary philosophical orientations. Among the methods identified by Mircea Eliade, one is, however, constantly questioned. In a section from Ordeal by Labyrinth, it is analysed under the name of demystifying attitude (Eliade 1985, 155-9). From the author's perspective, this seems to be totally inadequate with the object of the history of religions. That is because the mentioned attitude, often

present in the philosophical approaches of the discipline, is obviously a reductionist one, Eliade shows. According to this attitude, religious phenomena cannot and must not be researched from the perspective of religion itself, that is at their own "scale", but only in the light of other perspectives. There seems to be something hidden behind them, something that does not reveal itself, but that can be made manifest by means of certain interpretive techniques.

But what could there be behind the religious phenomena? The examples Eliade offers are eloquent: Marx and political economy, Freud and psychoanalysis, Lévi-Strauss and structuralism. With each one of the authors or the mentioned currents, religious phenomena are explained by resorting to various structures, each one of them considered ultimate or, anyway, more profound than religious facts. Thus, they are explained on the basis of some economic structures (Marx), of the structure of the unconscious (Freud) or of the collective mind and the institutions that are set up, in any community, as a result of it (structuralism). In other words, they are regarded as symptoms of economic, psychic and anthropological phenomena. According to Eliade, the element that imparts a unitary style to all of these approaches, rendering them convergent to one and the same point, is the conviction according to which religious beliefs are simple illusions. All the above mentioned authors start from the thesis that religious facts are inferred, almost mechanically, from certain impersonal and apparently objective structures.

This idea is not at all new. At first sight it seems to be a late and "exoteric" hypostasis of Hegel's idea of the "cunning of reason". Similarly to that, what is at play is the discovery of the manner in which man acts in the world in favour of an authority that is above him, but he acts with the conviction that his deeds are a result of his own will. Freedom is simply an appearance, as long as it is justified only by an economy that stands above it. However, the similarities with Hegel stop at this basic level. That is because the movement of the Hegelian philosophy is an integrating one, just as Eliade himself notices. Its stake is simply making the sense of things visible, which is identified as their place in the economy of the absolute is revealed. Therefore, the part acquires sense only through participation to the sense of the whole, that is to the speculative reason. For Hegel, this all-encompassing sense is the only real one. On the contrary, the sense of individual things proves to be no more than a moment in the vast meaning of the whole. (Afloroaei 1997, 222-3) Conceived in comparison with the hermeneutics implicitly at play in the Hegelian philosophy, the demystifying attitude seems to be rather the result of the 19th century Neo-Hegelian schools. It is not random that Marx and his followers made use of it without the least reserve.

This type of interpretation was analysed using the expression "the hermeneutics of suspicion", Nietzsche's name being often added to the list of the ones that practise it, whereas the reference to structuralism was sometimes missing. Gadamer, Foucault and Ricoeur contributed significantly to its clarification. According to them, its novelty is linked to the radical re-thinking of two themes: the status of the subject, on the one hand, and the status of the signs, on the other hand. With this hermeneutics, interpretation moves from what towards who, from what there is in the signified towards the subject that interprets it (Foucault 2001, 89). In other words, the focus moves from the object towards the act of interpreting, and also towards the one who interprets it. The reason for this transformation is that signs, which formerly used to guide interpretation, reveal their instability. Their fixity is only a "semiotic illusion". The hermeneutics of suspicion is born out of "the suspicion that language does not say exactly what it says". As Foucault shows, this suspicion represents an old habit of western culture. Once the

prima facie meaning of discourse is suspected, the placement in a post-semiotic age, in which signs get to be finally regarded as simple masks, becomes possible. Thus it is delineated the task of "exposing" the language, as removal of masks that language itself makes use of and gives credit to. The ingression into the world of the signs could thus dissipate the opacity that was attributed to them, opacity due to which they preserved their supremacy for so long (Foucault 2001, 80).

The interpretive techniques favoured by the advocates of the hermeneutics of suspicion have in common the fact that "we, too, the interpreters, have started to interpret ourselves with the help of these techniques" (Foucault 2001, 83). What exactly becomes manifest when interpretation is finally directed to the interpreter himself? What "truth" about him gets to the full light? In short, the discovered secret is that there is no secret. The pretended profundity of consciousness is delusive, and its eminence, often invoked by philosophers, is only a fake. Consciousness proves not to be what it thinks it is (Ricoeur 1998, 36): it is not identical to itself in all circumstances; it is not perfectly transparent and manifest. It is no longer master even of itself. Its scope is larger than it was believed in the past. That is because it contains unconscious data, that previous thinking had expelled from the sphere of sense, relegating it to the periphery of the human being (Ricoeur 1998, 45). In this regard, Eliade's analysis is worthy of paying full attention to it: including the unconscious, consciousness starts to be explained through something situated below it, being reduced not only to alien, but also to axiologically inferior elements. The strategy of the historian of religions will be totally opposite. He will try to show the way in which consciousness constitutes itself through elements superordinate to it, the only ones that truly confer it a sense. Instead of the unconscious, he will resort to supraconsciousness. The perspective thus assumed will actually be exactly the opposite of the demystifying attitude. Because of this, Eliade will say that his great bet is trying to demystify the demystification itself (Eliade 1985, 158-9), by revealing the hidden presence of the sacred in a desacralised world.

Europe's Nihilist Condition

Among the "hermeneutics of suspicion", a really special place is hold by the genealogical strategy, which can be understood both as method, and as way of philosophising. Introduced and theorised by Nietzsche, it knew some spectacular developments in the philosophy of the 20th century. First and foremost, it represented a possible model of destruction (Destruktion, Abbau), thematised by Heidegger in his early courses and in Sein und Zeit, but constantly exercised after the 1927 work as well. Then, during the second half of last century, its virtues were rediscovered by authors such as Foucault, Deleuze and Derrida, who included it in their own philosophical scenarios, finding out new possibilities for its development and, at the same time, new fields of application.

Genealogy's excellence consists both in its multiple applications, and in the fact that there is a radical critique of the western metaphysics it gave rise to. Both directions actually meet at the same point, which we can consider decisive for Nietzsche's philosophy as a whole. On the one hand, among the applications of the new method the one that stands out is the genealogical critique of religions and particularly of Christianism. On the other hand, through questioning the way in which philosophers conceive the divine, Nietzsche identifies one of their constant suppositions, namely the radical sepa-

ration between the "divine world" and the "sensitive world". In short, the former of the two directions is equivalent to the critique of religion in general and of Christianism in particular, whereas the latter focuses on the metaphysical understanding of the divine, which constantly transforms it into a simple concept, a representation or an idea (the natural or rational theology). Therefore, the convergence point of these two kinds of critique brings together Christianism and the metaphysics born out of it. But in what way do they meet – and under what conditions – in Nietzsche's thinking? Not last, what exactly is this point of convergence?

Their relationship, which Nietzsche seems to have been trying to pinpoint ever since his first works, is done by the very method he used. In other words, it is the specificity of the genealogical research that dictates the way of being of the researched thing. By investigating the origins of phenomena, Nietzsche always attacks on two fronts: a structural one and a historical one. The structural aspect comes into foreground when genealogical criticism discovers the logic of the phenomenon, its internal structure (even if it is temporary and conjunctural). The respective structure represents, at bottom, a simple delimitation of a certain moment, which appears as decisive in the whole history of the respective phenomenon. In fact, the two aspects are complementary. The logic of the researched phenomenon (its structure or grammar, the way in which it presents itself systematically) is neither bestowed on it by a miraculous beginning, nor is it consubstantial, appended to it from eternity. On the contrary, it constitutes itself – in an unspectacular manner, modestly, without brilliance – in the course of its insignificant evolution. In other words, it is a historical structure, a "historical a priori", if we are to use Foucault's terms.

Ever since he was writing his works Human, All Too Human, Daybreak and The Gay Science, Nietzsche's analysis was directed at different socio-historical totalities: nations, peoples, social groups, sexes, professions, religions, institutions. In his subsequent texts, it becomes more and more evident that genealogical investigation cannot discover unrelated, disconnected facts, but it has got to highlight profound structures which make those facts possible. Looking for them, Nietzsche first speaks about a way of being of Antiquity, completely different from the modern one. Therefore, at that time, he regarded Antiquity and modernity as complex structures, based on which the majority of moral, religious and cultural phenomena can be interpreted. During the last period of his work, the philosopher reaches the idea of the total unity of the European culture, conceived as a vast structure by means of which all phenomena can be understood. The fundamental part of the unity he was looking for is the Platonist-Christian supposition of the two "worlds", supposition which, according to him, defines European history as a deeply nihilistic one. Basically, "Platonism" consists in doubling the sensitive world, the only real one, by a so-called intelligible one. By dint of its transcendent character, the latter appears as the only "true" one. Consequently, the sensitive world is evaluated as "apparent", impure, derived, getting its justification from the exterior. According to Nietzsche, this supposition is present throughout the European culture under different guises. The philosophers, for instance, imagine the "true world" as one accessible only to reason, with its logical functions. Within Greek thinking, Socrates and Plato are its main creators. Then, the religious man projects it under the guise of a "divine world" ("the another world"), a "denaturalised, anti-natural world" (Nietzsche's favourite examples are Judaism and particularly Christianism). Finally, the moral man imagines it as a "free world", that is "good, perfect, just, holy". All these three worlds spring from a psychological error.

"The places of origin of the notion of 'another world':

the philosopher, who invents a world of reason, where reason and the logical functions are adequate: this is the origin of the 'true world';

the religious man, who invents a 'divine world': this is the origin of the 'denaturalized, anti-natural' world;

the moral man, who invents a 'free world': this is the origin of the 'good, perfect, just, holy' world.

What the three places of origin have in common: the psychological blunder, the physiological confusions." (Nietzsche 1968, 322; KSA 13, 14 [168], 353)

As we can notice, the convergence point we mentioned before, the one where the critique of religion and of rational theology meet, consists in the genealogical destruction of the western metaphysics, destruction understood by Nietzsche as "Platonism". In other words, the historical structure out of which European culture's nihilism derives is the metaphysics itself. It constitutes the "grammar" of the respective culture, its "logic". Thus, everything that has happened to the European man for two thousand years appears in a new light. His ways of thinking, his beliefs and representations, his vision about the world and about his own self are imbued, from the very beginning, by the latent nihilism of this in-depth structure. For Nietzsche, the decadent character – and, therefore, nihilistic – of (Christian) religion and of natural theology is the normal outcome of the nihilism present at the very heart of the European metaphysics. It is only in this way that the radical critique the philosopher launches against them can be adequately understood. Following it, we will be able to rigorously identify what the object of this critique is exactly.

Firstly, it is necessary to shortly present the fundamental ideas of Nietzsche's thinking, the ones that make up a minimal outline in whose absence his methodological and philosophical bet would remain completely unintelligible. As it is known, the fundamental concepts of this outline are force and will to power. According to Nietzsche, forces are the elementary elements which go into the making of things. The world can be imagined as being made up of a plurality of forces in permanent dispute, their relations varying from one moment to the next. They can be defined through their quantities: more or less, bigger or smaller. By dint of their quantities, certain forces will dominate others, in a certain neighbourhood. Their hierarchy, as well as their way of being, depend, firstly, on these quantitative relations. Mighty forces will be active, whereas weak ones will spontaneously embrace a reactive behaviour, aspiring towards their own conservation, but at the same time reacting to active forces. (Nietzsche 1989 a, 77-8; KSA 5, 314; Deleuze 1962, 69) Their intersection is a sort of force centre, and each centre generates a perspective of the whole. These configurations with temporary stability exist because forces are held together on the basis of the principle of their synthesis. The dominant force unifies, synthesises the differences, giving the other forces sense and order. This principle, the "organising force" of the respective configuration, is the very will to power. Such a synthesis exists in any relation of forces. (KSA 11, 26 [204], 203; KSA 11, 34 [125], 463; KSA 12, 1 [4], 11)

„The victorious concept 'force', by means of which our physicists have created God and the world, still needs to be completed: an inner world must be ascribed to it, which I designate as 'will to power', i.e., as an insatiable desire to manifest power; or as the employment and exercise of power, as a creative drive, etc." (Nietzsche 1968, 332-333; KSA 11, 36 [31], 563)

Similarly to forces, wills to power can have two qualities. They are either affirma-

tive, when what characterises them is growth and free expression of their overflow, or negative, when they are interested only in their conservation and in the desire to overturn the bad situation they are in. The will to power, Nietzsche insists, must be understood pluralistically. They are not multiple as individual elements, but each one of them is already plural, being nothing but a miniature world that does not last more than a moment. Will to power is only a name, a way "to define all efficient force unequivocally". (Nietzsche 1990 a, 67; KSA 5, 55) Its unity is the result of the operation of signifying. Beyond it there is multiplicity of forces that reach a certain organisation, at a certain moment. That is why the will to power is neither monad, nor atom, nor substance, but the significance of a multiplicity, a simple name useful to understanding and communication. It is a fact of language resulted out of a process that will be called interpretation in many other instances in Nietzsche's work.

Man is made up in the same way. The permanent dispute of forces – and, inferentially, of wills to power – represents, in this case, exactly the elements that define its corporality: instincts and senses, needs and drives, feelings and affections. As Nietzsche's terminology evolved, all these elements were gradually included in the concept of will to power, non-existent in his first works. Nietzsche shows that, in every human body, there is an "aristocracy", that is a "plurality of masters" which expresses itself by the fight of cells and tissues (KSA 12, 2 [76], 96; KSA 11, 40 [42], 650). In order to exert domination, the activities of corporeal wills to power diversify, through a "division of work". At bodily level, the stronger element forces the weaker one to become a simple instrument for the growth of its power. Exerting power – namely, the difference between the dominant will to power and the one submitted to it – is permanently accompanied by the matchless feeling of power. If human life were to be reduced to this type of action of the body, then man would not be at all different from others forms of existence. However, things present themselves differently. According to Nietzsche, man carries in himself the way of being of both the inorganic and the organic realms, but is not reduced to them. That is because the dominant impulses, instincts, needs and emotions, dominated from within, go beyond the strict frameworks of their primary range of action, imposing themselves as values and ideals, as benchmarks that have to be followed in any relation with reality, in other words "as the highest courts of values in general, indeed as creative and ruling powers". (Nietzsche 1968, 359; KSA 12, 7 [3], 257) In the human being, the "superstructure" of values and ideals turns back on corporeal "infrastructure", decisively changing its relation with the world. Moral and religious values, bestowed upon things by man, often alter the way of acting of instincts – of wills to power which are found at the core of his being – thus radically changing his very "world". Human evaluations do not derive mechanically out of his corporality, but are rather imposed from the outside. In Nietzsche's terms, the quantities of forces (and of wills to power) are deeply influenced by their qualities, that is by values and ideals. (Nietzsche 1968, 304; KSA 12, 2 [157], 142-143) Man evaluates the world through values and ideals, hypostatised by his moral, culture and religion, then assumed by him as if they constituted final truths and transformed, eventually, into his most intimate convictions.

„Our 'knowing' limits itself to establishing quantities; but we cannot help feeling these differences in quantity as qualities. Quality is a perspective truth for us; not an 'in-itself'. Our senses have a definite quantum as a mean within which they function; i.e., we sense bigness and smallness in relation to the conditions of our existence. If we sharpened or blunted our senses tenfold, we should perish; i.e., with regard to making possible our existence we sense even relations between magnitudes as qualities." (Nietzsche

1968, 304; KSA 12, 5 [36], 197)

„Qualities are insurmountable barriers for us; we cannot help feeling that mere quantitative differences are something fundamentally distinct from quantity, namely that they are qualities which can no longer be reduced to one another. But everything for which the word 'knowledge' makes any sense refers to the domain of reckoning, weighing, measuring, to the domain of quantity; while, on the other hand, all our sensations of value (i.e., simply our sensations) adhere precisely to qualities, i.e., to our perspective 'truths' which belong to us alone and can by no means be 'known'! It is obvious that every creature different from us senses different qualities and consequently lives in a different world from that in which we live. Qualities are an idiosyncrasy peculiar to man; to demand that our human interpretations and values should be universal and perhaps constitutive values is one of the hereditary madnesses of human pride." (Nietzsche 1968, 304-5; KSA 12, 6 [14], 238)

Values are a part of the human nature. In their absence, the world would be perceived in a totally different manner. "Our evaluations determine what things we generally accept and how exactly we accept them. But these evaluations are brought in and reglemented by our will to power." (KSA 11, 26 [414], 262) However, their main function is, according to Nietzsche, to increase domination. The explanation of this idea is precise and incisive. Man bestows his own meaning on things, imposing it as the only valid one, because in this way he can dominate both things, and people who live in their midst. Therefore, values contribute decisively to increasing the difference between the dominant will and the submissive wills. Out of all of them, the ones that fulfilled this function eminently are the very "good" and "evil", namely the religious moral values.

"But a mightier power and a new overcoming grow from your values." (Nietzsche 1969, 139; KSA 4, 149)

"Zarathustra has seen many lands and many peoples: Zarathustra has found no greater power on earth than the works these loving men: 'good' and 'evil' are their names." (Nietzsche 1969, 84; KSA 4, 76)

"You exert power with your values and doctrines of good and evil, you assessors of values; and this is your hidden love and the glittering, trembling, and overflowing of your souls." (Nietzsche 1969, 139; KSA 4, 149)

The whole being is already evaluated and interpreted, because is it submitted to man's creative power. This gives birth both to artistic illusions, sprung from affirmative wills, from the yes said to life, and to instrumental illusions, born out of the negation of life: "The interpretations up to now have all had a certain meaning for life – to conserve it, to make it bearable, or to estrange it, to polish it and also to separate what is ill and cause it to atrophy." (KSA 11, 40 [12], 633) Instrumental illusions rise out of the need of conservation. They are the work of weak and negative wills, that make use of them in an exclusively utilitarian manner. It is exactly in this respect that genealogical critique is necessary. Its role is to identify and fight off man's great illusions, ideals and values that negate life. At bottom, there are a few ways to say "no" to life: resentment, the unhappy consciousness and the ascetic ideal, thoroughly investigated in On the Genealogy of Morals. Their common origin is given by the moral-religious perspective, in which the European man's entire existence is rooted (Nietzsche 1968, 7-8; KSA 12, 2 [127], 125-126). With this perspective, the imperative according to which existence must have a meaning was imposed in the European culture: "The intelligible character of existence; the belief in 'meaning' is kept due to religious faith" (KSA 12, 2 [66], 91).

According to Nietzsche, this is practically the point where the European culture's consubstantial nihilism originates. Thus, the issue of the problem of nihilism appears as a perfectly equivocal one. On the one hand, it consists in the absence of meaning, in the disappearance of the absolute order of the being. The most radical form of this idea is the statement regarding "God's death". On the other hand, the reason for the respective disappearance is the very belief in such a state, in a meaning of existence taken as a whole. Consequently, it is not the event of "God's death" that is at the origin of nihilism, but a certain logic, a way of thinking present ever since the beginnings of the European culture.

„For some time now, our whole European culture has been moving as toward a catastrophe, with a tortured tension that is growing from decade to decade: restlessly, violently, headlong, like a river that wants to reach the end, that no longer reflects, that is afraid to reflect." (Nietzsche 1968, 3; KSA 13, 11 [411], 189)

According to Nietzsche, the nihilist manner of perceiving reality was born out of the negative wills to power, which gave life a meaning by which it was actually negated. It was thus that "supreme values" and the very idea of "true world" appeared. The latter is the invention of the reactive man, lacking creative will, which he replaces with "will to truth". Although reactive, this type of man did not deplete his "force to interpret", being capable of creating new fictions. The philosopher, the religious man and the moral man can be perfectly placed in this category. As a means of preserving life, morality – especially the Christian one – was, at a certain period of time, "the great antidote against practical and theoretical nihilism" (Nietzsche 1968, 10; KSA 12, 5 [71], 211). In contradistinction to the reactive man, the total nihilist does not believe in another world, but at the same time considers that this world should not exist at all. He "does no longer posses the force to interpret" as he "lacks will and force" and, because of that, believes that there is already a will and a meaning in things, a meaning that he needs to pertain to. In contrast to these two types of man, there is also the one endowed with "will to create" and to impose his own meaning on things. His way of being is affirmative and playful, and he comes up "at the end of a long drawn out error", when the "real world" becomes a fable and, once it retreats, "apparent" world disappears as well. As we can notice from the outlined typology, European history registers a discontinuity between the time of the emergence of (Christian) religion and the time found under the sign of "God's death".

Guilt and Sin. Genealogical Investigations

Let us return to Nietzsche's method, in order to further follow its applications on religious phenomena. What is it that particularly characterises genealogical investigation? What are its stakes and what new aspects does it bring to philosophy? In order to identify the origins of values, it sets out to understand the wills to power out of which they resulted, their differences and, last but not least, their actions in the field of power. The most important feature of genealogy is represented by pluralism. It does not reveal a unique origin, but the multiplicity of origins; not one truth, but multiple accidents, reversals, deviations, errors which lead to a phenomenon's value. Supporting this idea, Nietzsche polemises with an older interpretive practice, also termed genealogy by the English utilitarians. Paul Rée, for instance, believed that the whole history of morals derived out of the human tendency to utility. If things were to be this way, then it would

mean that, properly speaking, nothing happened in history, and the same ideas and logic succeeded along the time line. It would be as if words, ideals, goals and human values had not changed their meanings at all throughout time, a fact noticed by Foucault, too. Thus, the historian would flunk the very singularity of phenomena. All of them would have one and the same origin. The only way they could be distinguished would be by their accidents, which, however, according to the utilitarian method, do not have any explanation. But the aim of genealogy is to discover what exactly makes a phenomenon stand out, its differences, the marks that confer it a certain image. Then, if all moral phenomena were explainable by a unique origin (such as utility), this last one should be a kind of principle belonging to them, a miraculous origin (Wunderursprung) which would explain them formally, although remaining impossible to understand. Such a unique and immutable origin would be nothing else than a so-called permanent "essence", which would provide the respective fact with a complete identity, thus perfectly explaining its entire behaviour. According to Nietzsche, beyond (or before) things there is nothing but a multiplicity of instincts, affections and of wills to power that fight each other, each of them trying to dominate all the others.

The non-linear perspective on history constitutes the second feature of genealogy. Refusing the idea that all identical phenomena would be justifiable through their principle, it focuses on the local context out of which the researched event emerges at a certain moment. As far as it is concerned, this is a common and insignificant context, lacking the greatness and solemnity of the "noble origin". According to Nietzsche, the belief in the noble origin is an old metaphysical habit, one which supposes that "what is more valuable and essential would stand at the beginning of all things". (KSA 2, 540) An event is nothing but the temporary configuration of wills to power. In a certain place and at a certain time, they find themselves in a certain balance, their play (or their dispute) registering a certain power relation. It is, so to say, the reference system of those forces and wills to power, a system of domination by definition. In other words, it is the stage on which wills fight each other. But, throughout time, they situated themselves on totally different stages, always playing different roles. That is the reason why history is not linear. This idea can be illustrated through the example of the ascetic ideal. This ideal does not have a universal meaning. There is not one ascetic ideal, but only multiple meanings, variable as far as the type of will we encounter is concerned. Ascetic ideals mean one thing for artists, and a different thing for "philosophers and scholars", one thing for women, but something different for "the physiologically deformed and deranged (the majority of mortals)" and, evidently, a totally different thing for priests and saints. (KSA 5, 339; Kofman 1972, 178) Genealogy discovers that the fact we thought was permanent, fixed and already settled is, in reality, dependent on a fluid element, namely on the history of the changes of perspective, on the history of evaluations and interpretations which are truly part of the respective phenomenon. Therefore, genealogy's task is to establish the place of some origins throughout history and the stages they act upon. Moreover, acquiring dominance over a stage of forces takes place, most often, by altering the precedent stage, or even by transporting the dispute from one stage to another. The rules of the preceding one, on which certain forces were dominant, are changed once the dispute takes place on a different stage. The new rules modify the preceding relation. That is another reason why genealogy fights against the idea according to which history would be linear. (Foucault 2001, 183, 192-4)

Genealogy always identifies two types of origin: the context out of which the researched phenomenon emerges, but also the decisive impulse which, in that situation,

leads to its configuration. So, this impulse is nothing else but the will to power that dominates the ones in its neighbourhood. But, as we have previously shown, each will to power is made up of a plurality of forces. They refer to belonging to a group (the "nobles" or the "poor"), to a tradition or a race, therefore to atavisms and hereditary aspects. The genealogical analysis identifies them at the level of the body: in the nervous system and the secretions, in difficult breathing, in bad nutrition and the ill functioning of the digestive system. Thus, this is not about reducing the individual aspect to something common to several people, but only to find again the sub-individual elements which, by crossing themselves, form the complex network that is the individual himself (Foucault 2001, 188). A good illustration of this last idea and, at the same time, of the coexistence of the two types of origin can be found in a fragment from Human, All Too Human, in which Nietzsche shows that human feelings are not unities, even if we are used to speaking about a moral or a religious feeling: "In truth, they are rivers with a hundred sources and tributaries". "All intense moods bring with them a resonance of related feelings and moods; they seem to stir up memory. Something in us remembers and becomes aware of similar states and their origin (Herkunft). Thus habitual, rapid associations of feelings and thoughts are formed which, when they follow with lightning speed upon one another, are eventually no longer felt as complexes, but rather as unities". (KSA 2, 35)

As we can notice, genealogy identifies discontinuities and new elements, that is, events. In order to suggest discontinuity, Nietzsche prefers the term invention (Erfindung), which he often invokes with a polemic purpose; namely, it is used against the idea of origin, with the meaning that classical metaphysicians and traditionalist historians attribute it. For instance, Schopenhauer's thesis is criticised in The Gay Science. According to it, the origin of religion can be found in a metaphysical feeling common to all people. (Nietzsche 1974, 296; KSA 3, 589-590) However, history does not occur in this way. Here is Nietzsche's argument, on which Foucault insists: if religion had its origin in a feeling, we should suppose that there is continuity between this origin (the feeling) and the analysed phenomenon (the religion itself). But, according to Nietzsche, there was a distance between the time when religion did not yet exist and the time when it does. Before its coming into being, it did not exist even virtually, as a possibility (Foucault 2004, 95). It did not exist in latent form, in a universal feeling of man, but in one that appeared at a certain moment, namely the feeling of guilt, correlated with the belief in sin.

"(...) Man's 'sinfulness' is not a fact, but merely the interpretation of a fact, namely of physiological depression – the later viewed in a religio-moral perspective that is no longer binding on us." (Nietzsche 1989 a, 129; KSA 5, 376)

The genealogy of sin and of the feeling of guilt represents a model of Nietzsche's relationship with Christian religion. One of the most important contexts in which it can be encountered is the one in which the ascetic ideal is discussed, in a whole section from On the Genealogy of Morals. The previously mentioned ideal defines the way of being and the activities of the ascetic priest. His situation can be understood through the point of view of medicine. The priest is necessary just because of the disease he suffers from. That is because it is often that sick people are better taken care of by other sick people than by healthy doctors. "The necessity of doctors and nurses who are themselves sick" – it is in this that the vocation of the anchorite is revealed (Nietzsche 1989 a, 125; KSA

5, 372). The propinquity in illness with the ones already sick helps him to understand them perfectly. Incurably sick, he must, however, be strong as well, a master of himself. It is only in this way that he can win the trust and the respect of others; it is only thus that he can be a "God" for them. His action is contradictory. For the healthy ones, it is a curse: "as at such things it is good this wizard and beast tamer, around whom all that is healthy inevitably falls ill". For the ones already sick, he is a source of consolation. He is a sorcerer, "in whose presence everything healthy necessarily grows sick, and everything sick tame". Of course, this is the same as turning well. The patient turned into a doctor is, we can say, a real pharmakon: both cure and poison, both curse and blessing for his patients. But how exactly is it that he changes the direction of resentment, changing their way of being? It is here that his qualities can be seen, his gift as a teacher. It is only now that his power of seduction and conviction reaches its goal. In a word, he alters the most precious habit of sick people, that of looking for the reason of their suffering outside them, in a agent not only supposedly guilty, but at the same time alive, and thus accessible to suffering; "in short, some living thing upon which he can (...) vent his affects". (Nietzsche 1989 a, 127; KSA 5, 374) Thus they alleviate their suffering: they unload it in the same way one detonates an undesirable "explosive matter". Pain is anaesthetised by means of another, stronger, more violent and wilder emotion than itself (Nietzsche 1989 a, 127; KSA 5, 374). The true reasons for suffering can only be physiological. But how is it that the change of direction of resentment takes place? By what ruse does the ascetic priest succeed in achieving such a profound transformation of man? His strategy is simple: he forces his patient to consider himself guilty. Not being able to survive if he does not imagine a perpetrator, the sick person lets himself be convinced that he is the only guilty one. This is the "gift" the ascetic priest gives him. From that moment on, all sick people of this type will take their guilt upon themselves (Nietzsche 1989 a, 128; KSA 5, 375). In most religions, this phenomenon is called "sin". However, as we can see from the previously presented facts, the so-called "sinfulness" is a simple interpretation, just as the "psychological pain" is one (Nietzsche 1989 a, 129; KSA 5, 376). This is the mechanism by which the "direction of resentment is altered". The person who adopts such an interpretation, imposed as universal by the priests from all times, values his interiority in a totally different way. Even if in his case, too, it remains only a borrowed one, the sick person gets to conceive it as a "fact". In this regard, the ascetic ideal functions by the same model of faith in an immovable truth that science embraces as well (Nietzsche 1989 a, 152; KSA 5, 400). It is here that genealogy steps in. It is called in to demonstrate this imagined "fact", put into things by an interpretation whose status was forgotten in time, being taken as reality itself. The ascetic ideal has to do with what Nietzsche calls passive nihilism, which consists in "whatever refreshes, heals, calms, numbs emerges into the foreground in various disguises, religious or moral, or political, or aesthetic, etc." (Nietzsche 1968, 18; KSA 12, 9 [35], 351) This appears as "man would rather will nothingness than not will".

Besides the genealogy of sin, Nietzsche tries to identify the origins of the concept "God". This concept, a real turning point, as we find out from an aphorism, "represents a turning away from life, a critique of life, even a contempt of it" (Nietzsche 1968, 91; KSA 13, 15 [42], 436). Consequently, its origins can be found in the negative wills to power. The God of morality and of philosophers is man's creation, therefore a simple illusion. No matter what he is conceived like, as an image or as a simple concept, he is a human error. (KSA 4, 35; KSA 4, 109-110; KSA 6, 60). Obviously, this idea must be taken into account in connection with the theme of will to power.

„The sole way of maintaining a meaning for the concept 'God' would be: God not as the driving force, but God as maximal state, as an epoch – a point in the evolution of the will to power by means of which further evolution just as much as previous evolution up to him could be explained." (Nietzsche 1968, 340; KSA 12, 10 [138], 535)

„'God' as the moment of culmination: existence an eternal deifying and un-deifying. But in that not a high point of value, but a high point of power." (Nietzsche 1968, 379; KSA 12, 9 [8], 343)

According to Nietzsche, God is a simple moment of the will to power, a reactive expression of this one. But, as we know, two situations are possible: the increase of power, or, on the contrary, its weakening. This idea is presented in a paragraph from The Anti-Christ, in which the Christian notion of God is criticised. Each authentic people, which believes in itself, has still got its own God, Nietzsche shows. It projects its own feeling of power, its needs and joy into this God, with the purpose of being able to thank him for all this later. In other words, the concept of God is necessary in order to satisfy man's need for gratitude: "one is grateful for oneself: for that one needs a God". (Nietzsche 1990 c, 138; KSA 6, 182) According to this genealogical exercise, God is born out of a psychological need of man. But this type of needs do not resume to expressing gratefulness. In fact, man casts his entire psychological life in the mentioned concept. For this reason, God must be seen as a friend as well as an enemy, as cause of both good and evil, of useful things, as well as of bad things. That is why, the concept of an "emasculated" God, reduced to the function of good, is not sufficient for man: "One has as much need of the evil God as the good God". The disappearance of the "evil" aspect from the being of a people's God constitutes the most evident symptom of its weaknesses. When one realises that his God has become weak, then it is a sign that the respective people is perishing, that it has completely lost its faith in the future and its hope of freedom is vanishing completely. (Nietzsche 1990 c, 138; KSA 6, 182) The God characterized only by love can only be a "God for everybody", "cosmopolitan". "Formerly he represented a people, the strength of a people, everything aggressive and thirsting for power in the soul of a people." (Nietzsche 1990 c, 138; KSA 6, 183) All along history, Nietzsche shows, one can only come across these two types of Gods. "There is in fact no other alternative for Gods: either they are the will to power – and so long as they will be national Gods –, or else the impotence for power – and then they necessarily become good..." (Nietzsche 1990 c, 139; KSA 6, 183)

In Nietzsche's work, the critique of the Christian religion is extremely complex. It is directed both at the ecclesiastical institution, which would distort the original Christian experience, being in fact entirely anti-Christian, and at the effects of the Christian morality on the way of thinking of the European man. Both aspects – the critique of the institution of Church and of the European thinking – cannot be separated from the radical critique of metaphysics.

From Rational Theology to Dionysiac Pluralism

The manner in which Nietzsche conceives the critique of metaphysics has as a central moment the bringing forth of the theological component of metaphysics, acknowledged under the name of natural or rational theology. Taken literally, the enunciation regarding "God's death" is truly terrifying. It is intended to be the precise description of a state of being, of a central event of the European history, deeply engrained by the phe-

nomenon of nihilism. In short, this means that the values and the ideals of the European culture are no longer efficient. Moreover, the respective event has deeper and much older origins. Nietzsche identifies it as an in-depth structure, as a logic that supports, from the very beginning, the way of being of the European man. The philosopher acts as a doctor in this respect: recording the symptoms of the illness, he finds out its hidden causes, in order to further come up with a treatment. When the foundation of European values – the nothingness – is brought forth, this fact is accompanied by panic, in the same way as the certainty of an illness terrifies the sick person. However, it is only the revelation of the illness that can convince him to bear the treatment. Nietzsche's analysis of the modern world, carried out in a quasi-medical language, as well as the prescription and the diagnosis he gave must be permanently referred to his philosophical outlook, at the heart of which there is life, understood as will to power. According to this "medical" scenario, the statement regarding God's death is equivalent to the acknowledgement of the falling of a whole world, followed by the identification of the reason for this: the nothingness.

But what exactly was that "world"? Was it just the supra-sensitive "world" of ideals, which represented, along many centuries, the main justification for reality? It had lost its efficiency, not being able to justify European man's way of being anymore. The history of this "error", as Nietzsche calls it, encompasses all instances that held, one by one, the central place in metaphysics, the place of purpose of the whole existence: ideas, God, the moral imperative, progress, happiness, culture and civilisation. It is this idea that stands at the core of Heidegger's interpretation, according to which the announcement of "God's death" supposes becoming aware of the reversal of the "value" of all preceding values. (Heidegger 1980, 205-263) Values that were considered "supreme" lose their status, their place being inevitably taken by the ones formerly regarded as "weak". But the principle of this reversal is the will to power. In Heidegger's interpretation, this is the pure and absolute will that wants itself (in other words, "will to will"). God's death occurs when his place is taken by another instance. But what is the "place" he holds? In other words, what is his function? Within metaphysical thinking, the place God holds is the one of causal efficiency and of conservation of the created world. It is exactly this place that stays unoccupied. With the beginning of modern age, it is the subject who has turned into the symbolic centre of the world. When man established himself as ego cogito, whose latest hypostasis is the will to power, God's death becomes unavoidable. In this regard, Heidegger's interpretation stays true to a famous fragment from The Gay Science (Nietzsche 1974, 181-2; KSA 3, 480-2): "Whither is God? (...) We have killed him – you and I! All of us are his murderers!" The madman who announces God's death to some unfaithful people cries incessantly: "I seek God!" This might be the beginning of the remedy, suggests Heidegger. The reason is easily understandable: Nietzsche attacks a certain, totally inadequate, image upon God, namely the one made up by man. The brought up figure of the divine is one of a moral idol. This idea is supported, by decisive arguments, by Jean-Luc Marion. Whereas the idol favours the purely human experience of the divine, transforming it into a simply present being, the icon preserves the distance between the divine and the human, rendering visible the image the divine itself can show. As Marion specifies, the divine visits us in the distance itself, beyond our sensitive and conceptual idols. In philosophical terms, if the supreme existence is an instance belonging to metaphysics, another image of the divine than the one offered by onto-theology should be looked for. Thus, a different experience of the divine would be necessary and, at the same time, a theology situated beyond onto-theology. Would the expo-

sure of the idols – the way Nietzsche achieves it – free a space not taken by idols? Does it come up with a different manner to test the divine? (Marion 1989, 22-6) Marion asserts that the simple announcement of "God's death" is insufficient to overcome nihilism. Redeeming of the divine, as Nietzsche does it, takes place within metaphysics and nihilism, as it is achieved through a new idol – the will to power. Nietzsche remains idolater because he does not enter into the distance, but remains at the "pathos of distance". In fact, absolute distance resides in the fact that no idol can announce God's life or death, "who only had immortality, dwelling in the light which no man can approach unto, whom no man had seen, nor can see" (1 Timothy, 6, 16). On the contrary, the pathos of distance ("the feeling of distance"), although found at the origin of the creation of values, ignores in fact God's distance, trying to substitute itself to him (Marion 1989, 101-104). According to Marion, a totally different experience would only be to let the divine attain to the word, to interpellate us where we do not expect it, namely in the distance itself. In a fragment from the work Beyond Good and Evil (§ 295), Nietzsche invokes the idea that it is not the philosophers who attain to the divine, but the divine starts to philosophise:

"The very fact that Dionysus is a philosopher, and that gods too therefore philosophise, seems a by no means harmless novelty, and one calculated to excite suspicion precisely among philosophers." (Nietzsche 1990 a, 220; KSA 5, 238)

The announcement of "God's death" is neither an individual gesture of rebellion, nor the incontrovertible proof of Nietzsche's atheism. It is the description of an event, maybe the most important in the modern history of the world. We find out what it actually supposes by means of three metaphors (Nietzsche 1974, 181-2; KSA 3, 480-2). "How could we drink up the sea?", wonders the madman who proclaims this memorable phenomenon. The disappearance of the sea symbolises the negation of the infinite, of its presence in the finite world. "Who gave us the sponge to wipe away the entire horizon?" As we know, the horizon is a metaphor of the limit, of the fact of encompassing things in a space where they acquire their outline, determination and shape. The disappearance of the horizon symbolises the negation of this space, of the world in which every thing reaches a determinate way of being. In the history of metaphysics, its role was played by the so-called "real world", whose final hypostasis within modernity is, according to Nietzsche, the ego as such, with its various hypostasis. In the absence of the horizon, man becomes again free to give the measure of things himself. Finally, the madman wonders: "What were we doing when we unchained this earth from its sun?" The sun, analogon of the Idea of Good and of the Christian God, signifies the ultimate reason of the whole existence in the history of metaphysics. Its disappearance creates space for earth itself. Liberated by the justification through a "real world", earth becomes sufficient to itself.

In fact, God's death can be perceived only by the one who has experienced the divine in his own life and with his whole being, even if only as perception of his absence. The announcement brings forth the urgency of looking for a remedy, revealing, however, the possibility of some "new gods" occurring, as well. The idea is illustrated in the same aphorism from The Gay Science. The madman who announces God's death shows his tragic condition, too. "Whither are we moving? (...) Are we not straying as through an infinite nothing? Do we not feel the breath of empty space? Has it not become colder? Is not night continually closing in on us?" The disappearance of the sun brings along the night. How can things be seen any more? Does not orientation become impossible? Is man ready to be himself the source of light of the entire being? "Is it not the great-

ness of this deed too great for us? Must we ourselves not become gods simply to appear worthy of it?" The answer to the madman's questions is the superhuman. The situation Nietzsche puts up is worth being displayed in all its details. Before the superman's coming, the madman makes the memorable announcement in the pale light of a lantern. This is the damage light due to which the disappearance of the "real world" can be seen. But it cannot be put up with, as man has not yet discovered orientation in the immanence of this world, the only existing one. That is why the madman becomes sceptical: "At last he threw his lantern on the ground, and it broke into pieces and went out. 'I have come too early', he said then; 'my time is not yet. This tremendous event is still on its way, still wandering; it has not yet reached the ears of men' (...)." (Nietzsche 1974, 182; KSA 3, 481)

The divine, understood in the most radical way, is not the God of morality and of metaphysics, but the God that "is about to come", therefore the one that occurs from the future towards the present. Acknowledging God's absence, that is his inefficiency for modern man's life as such, Nietzsche wonders what functions he used to fulfil, what his use was for life. The answer is not at all surprising. God was ensuring the fixity of values; he was the active force behind their transformation into immutable data that form the basis of both religion and morality. It was also him that was ensuring the truth, therefore the truth of science and knowledge in general, of the identity of things with himself, of their unity. God was the principle of the difference between truth and error, a measure of the separation between the true and the apparent world. He had to be "killed" in order to dissolve the onto-theological separation between the two "worlds" and the epistemological separation between truth and error. In all these cases, he was fulfilling a metaphysical function. It is the reason for which "God's death" entails a "long plenitude and sequence of breakdown, destruction, ruin, and cataclysm that is now impending" (Nietzsche 1974, 279; KSA 3, 573)

Nietzsche's model of critique did not go unnoticed in the 20th century. The critique of the rational theology has often come back into focus, its main purpose being to remove God's understanding as a simple concept, therefore as an idol, so as to reveal an original experience of the divine. For Heidegger, for instance, the philosophers' God remains a simple present being, a historical determination through which the being itself was represented as supreme existence. Also within the framework of phenomenology, authors such as Michel Henry, Emmanuel Lévinas or Jean-Luc Marion, to name jus a few of the best known ones, try to go down to the roots of theology, in order to highlight the very possibility that the divine reveals itself and becomes a phenomenon. In a different register, Derrida draws an analogy between deconstruction and apophatic theology, investigating the conditions of possibility of what is, by definition, the very impossible, the incalculable, the indeterminate. Finally, within the framework of the Biblical hermeneutics, the expansion of the fact of interpretation is liked to exploring the weakened regime of the sacred text, which can be seen as any other text, therefore as a compilation of social games and reading practices, getting close to the status of the myth which, lacking a text of origin, permanently translates itself. (Greisch 1985, 28)

Rigorously speaking, the announcement of "God's death" does not necessarily prove the atheism of the one that professes it. In Ecce homo, Nietzsche states that, for him, atheism results from the instinct of not accepting an already given, definitely set answer.

"'God', 'immortality of the soul', 'redemption', 'beyond' – without exception, concepts to which I never devoted any attention, or time (...) I do not by any means know

atheism as a result; even less as an event: it is matter of course with me, from instinct. I am too inquisitive, too questionable, too exuberant to stand for any gross answer. God is a gross answer, an indelicacy against us thinkers – at bottom merely a gross prohibition for us: you shall not think!" (Nietzsche 1989 b, 236-7; KSA 6, 278-9)

In the foreground of Nietzsche's "atheism" there is the programmatic refusal of the given. God as a simple answer – this idea is unacceptable to Nietzsche. The critique of values, of idols, of ideals has as a purpose the refusal of mediation, be it by means of an image, a concept or by language in general. (KSA 1, 878-881) Its stake is expressing the will to power in the absence of any mediation. Nietzsche's enemy is God as an idol, as a simple present being, as mediator of life (and of the will to power) with itself. In his early works, the representation in the absence of the image and of the concept is attributed to the Dionysian art. (Liiceanu 1993, 168)

"God's death", Nietzsche shows, is the most important event of modern times, with important consequences on our way of being. It brings with it the complete nihilism, experimented by man as total absence of all meaning that was already formed. Thus, it opens up a space free of already fixed meanings and prejudices, a space in which new experiences become possible. For this reason, nihilism must not be seen as a negative occurrence. On the contrary, according to Nietzsche, it brings with itself "a new and scarcely describable kind of light, happiness, relief, exhilaration, encouragement, dawn".

"Indeed, we philosophers and 'free spirits' feel, when we hear the news that 'the old god is dead', as if a new dawn shone on us; our heart overflows with gratitude, amazement, premonitions, expectation. At long last the horizon appears free to us again, even if it should not be bright; at long last our ships may venture out again, venture out to face any danger; all the daring of the lover of knowledge is permitted again; the sea, our sea, lies open again; perhaps there has never yet been such an 'open sea'." (Nietzsche 1974, 280; KSA 3, 574)

In fact, this new way of being represents the condition which makes possible the creation of new values and of the yes said to the whole existence. "The concept 'God' has hitherto been the greatest objection to existence... We deny God; in denying God, we deny accountability: only by doing that do we redeem the world". (Nietzsche 1990 b, 65; KSA 6, 97) Nietzsche values Antiquity's pagan religious cults, which he understands as "a form of thanksgiving and affirmation of life", one in which happens the overflow of a tragically, but fulfilled spirit, that assumes the contradictions and the questionable aspects of existence. (Nietzsche 1968, 542; KSA 11, 41 [6] [7], 680-2) For the "tragic man", suffering is bearable because world as such is sacred in itself, in his vision. (Nietzsche 1968, 540; KSA 11, 41 [6] [7], 680-2) Dionysus' image is invoked as symbol of plurality, just as we come across it, to a great extent, in the pagan religions of Antiquity. His preference for them is due not only to his option for pluralism, but also to the fact that they render possible the discovery of the factical life, the rooting of meanings and human values in the corporality of man and, by its mediation, in nature as such.

5. Conclusion

Genealogy discovers that values and ideals are rooted in man's corporality, which carries the whole pre-human world in itself. Religious values and beliefs are not different. Is this a proof of the reductionism of Nietzsche's method? Not at all. The fact that Nietzsche sets the focus on instincts, affects, needs and impulses does not mean that the

interpretation of religious phenomena will be limited to them. Rediscovering the "earth" of man, genealogy is not intended to reduce a group of phenomena to others. The stake of Nietzsche's approach is to do justice to the element that was forgotten by classical thinking, an element that classical thinking even banished from the human "nature". From religion to culture and metaphysics, all these aspects result out of man's factical life, which is only a summary of the "text of nature" and, at the same time, its consequence. All human freedom, projected into the world through ideals and values, is decisively imbued by corporality. Not to see the union between the body, on the one hand, and values and ideals, on the other hand, favouring only man's elevated part – this was the error of the previous thinking. Although it derives out of the corporality (of the forces and wills of power), values are the expression of man's freedom, the assertion of his overflow and of his capability. Moreover, as we have seen, they go back to the insignificant element out of which they arise, changing it. Because of this, we can conclude that the stake of Nietzsche's genealogy is to discover, in every phenomenon, the unity between body and values, between what it is given to man and his possibilities.

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