Genealogy as Possibility of Openness to Difference: Critique of Power and Domination by Foucault

Kasım KÜÇÜKALP∗

The most distinctive characteristic of modern Western philosophy, in comparison with conventional philosophical comprehensions and problematic, might be that the philosophy gradually became an activity of thought which concentrates on ethic and political problems, leaving behind its pure theoretical character as a discipline. Accordingly, another feature of modern thought is that disciplines such as philosophy, literature, art, aesthetics, psychology and social theories etc. interpenetrate within an activity of thinking pursuant to certain interaction which even abolishes certain distinctions in between. Philosophy has gained a content that ethical and political issues come into prominence and the distinction between disciplines have relatively disappeared mostly because classical and modern thoughts and theories lost their validity in our day and underwent, therefore, radical critique. Such critique is articulated in the claim that classical and modern thought and theories mostly adopt the practice of essentialist, universalist and totalising discourse, and that they legitimise epistemic, ethic and political violence applied on beings in connection with power relationships of such practice of discourse.

Numerous post-structuralist and postmodern thinkers, including Foucault, criticise classical and modern Western thought, asserting that comprehension with regard to being and truth by rationalist, essentialist and universalist philosophies pave the way for a style of thought which negates differences, becoming and life within a totalising discourse. According to these thinkers, the allegedly rational and universal theories on knowledge

∗   Uludağ Üniversitesi İlahiyat Fakültesi, Felsefe Tarihi A.B.D, Doç. Dr.

and truth, which are put forth by classical and modern philosophies, provide the basis for disregard of different lifestyles and forms of identity within totalising forms of discourse that abide by a logic of identity in ethic and political spheres.

In this respect, efforts to reveal the connection between allegations of truth and power relationships by means of establishing a genealogy of ethics, which is the practical embodiment of Western thought in general and the mentioned approach in particular, have become one of the most debated issues in Western philosophy as of Nietzsche. Such discussion, which also constitutes the framework of hereby study, concentrates on how the allegations of truth serve in favour of interests of certain powers and as an oppressive function through legitimisation of life under domination of such powers. The legitimisation of domination via allegations of knowledge and truth, as well as subsequent disregard of differences, constitutes the central axis of Foucault's philosophy. As a Nietzschean, Foucault applies the method of genealogy on the society and traces the relations of domination in connection with knowledge-power relation in modern society. In this direction, we will try to deal with the thoughts that Foucault put forward with the emphasis on difference in the context of the analysis of the relation between discourse, knowledge, power and domination, which he dealt with from the method of genealogy.

In line with Nietzschean genealogy, Foucault tries to reveal how the individuals are disciplined and controlled in modern societies. According to Foucault, discipline and control over subjects in modern society are grounded on legitimate basis through approval of allegations and practices by social studies and humanities such as medicine, psychiatry, criminology, sociology etc. Humanities or social sciences construct mechanisms to discipline individuals through their produced knowledge and normalising practices, as well as norms for human behaviours, so as to institutionalise a new kind of power regime. Disciplinary and normalising standards by social studies or humanities dominate every space of social life, such as workplace, classroom, hospital, psychiatric hospitals and courtrooms.[1] In the eyes of Foucault, humanities "try to define normality; they institution-

1   Derda Küçükalp, *Siyaset Felsefesi*, Dora Yayınları, Bursa 2016, p. 12.

alise this normality as a lifestyle for us and simultaneously, they produce a
vast domain of knowledge from this standard (with regard to possible an-
gles of deviation) for the purpose of research, surveillance and treatment."[2]

The foregoing assertion by Foucault reveals, on the one hand, that hu-
manities and social studies are – despite all their alleged neutrality – a
part of disciplining and normalising through knowledge and norms they
generate. On the other hand, he indicates that the modern thought, by its
foundation, comprises a perspective that denies differences by means of
creating various modalities and modes of subjectivity through discourse,
knowledge and power. The true objective of Foucault, after all, is to pro-
vide "difference, local and specific knowledge with elbowroom, to grasp
possibilities and breaks" through critique of things that are considered as
great systems, theories and life truths. In a Foucauldian perspective, con-
struction of any kind of theoretical point of view or a theory means to
speak on behalf of others and to impose laws for their existence. This is
nothing but suggestion of a new tyranny in the sense of a new orthodoxy.[3]

According to Foucault, many things, which are considered universal
by man, are consequences of very definite historical changes. Therefore,
Foucault's analyses are against the idea of universal necessities that are
considered to be within human existence. These analyses put forth the
arbitrariness of institutions; besides, they can show the areas of freedom
which may still please us as well as possible changes to that end. This is a
frequent motive in the study by Foucault on conditions of coming of mod-
ern identities and categories about sexuality. Most of his later works con-
centrate on how, in practical terms, we can apply to this kind of historical
approaches, as well as on the problematic of their ethic implications with
regard to establishment of the meaning of "self". In this context, Foucault
severely criticises the earlier type of humanism that presents itself as an
exact ethic form in the sense of a universal model towards any freedom.
For him, humanism, as it is presented in a dogmatic manner in all aspects
of political life, may comprise much more secret and probable possibilities

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2   Quentin Skinner, *Çağdaş Temel Kuramlar*, transl. Ahmet Demirhan, Vadi Yayınları,
    Ankara 1991, p. 71.
3   Quentin Skinner, ibid, pp. 72-73.

of freedom than imagined;[4] thus, criticisms by Foucault can be considered as an opportunity to open out to mentioned possibilities and imaginations.

According to Foucault, words, as the valuable neutral means of representation, do not have a privileged status among the order of things. The modernist approach, which considers possible the epistemic representation of truth, value and meaning in line with construction of subject, is deprived of its value by Foucault through revelation of illusions within.[5] The greatest illusion of them all is to rely on the meta-narratives of Enlightenment, which present themselves in an allegation of universality and objectivity, as if they include no power relationships. Indeed, these meta-narratives function so as to operate the finest mechanisms of power on human body and soul. In this regard, the concept of 'subject' is rendered an object of disciplines and norms.[6] Foucault points out that the subject is not a given thing, but it is formed within various political and epistemic practices in historical terms; he wants to put forth a history of various modes of the culture wherein men are produced as subjects.[7] Such target can only be achieved through analysis of concepts of, above all, "power," "relation between power and knowledge," and "discourse".

As for analyses of power, Foucault, in his earlier works, comprehends the power in a sense which is defined rather through negative terms and which is almost identical with violation of law. Nevertheless, he later (1971-1972) handles the concept of power once again, puts it to assessment and begins to allow for "a technical and strategic power concept instead of a judgmental and negative one."[8] As a result of his interest in the conceptualisation of *genealogy* by Nietzsche, Foucault does not actually

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4 Simon Watney, "Practices of Freedom: 'Citizenship' and the Politics of Identity in the Age of AIDS", *Identity: Community, Culture, Difference*, ed. Jonathan Rutherford, Lawrence & Wishart, London 1990, pp. 157-187., p. 183.

5 Hayden White, "The Value of Narrativity in The Representation of Reality", *Knowledge and Postmodernism in Historical Perspective*, Routledge, Great Britain, 1996, p. 408.

6 Appleby; *Covington et al, Knowledge and Postmodernizm in Historical Perspective*, Routledge, Great Britain 1996, p. 409.

7   Todd May, *Postyapısalcı Anarşizmin Siyaset Felsefesi*, transl. Rahmi G. Öğdül, Ayrıntı, İstanbul, 2002, p. 98.

8 Madan Sarup, *Post-Yapısalcılık ve Postmodernizm*, transl. A. Baki Güçlü, Ark Yayınevi, Ankara 1995, p. 92.

establish a new theory of power; instead, he opts for adopting a new approach towards the problems made by the power in modern societies and putting forth some general rules for analysis of the power in this respect.[9]

According to Foucault, genealogy should be a history which essentially includes a creative action; however, it is not the meaning relationships but power relationships that are influential on the history which has the capacity to capture and determine us. Therefore, Foucault's objective is to tell incidents from one another, to differentiate the networks and levels wherein these incidents take place, and to resurrect the lines on which such incidents are interconnected and contribute to formation of one another. For this purpose, Foucault is convinced about necessity of not analysis of meaning relationships under influence of concepts of symbol and sign, but of "applying to domain of analysis determined by concepts such as genealogy of power relationships, strategic developments and tactics."[10]

In the eyes of Foucault, the power is no asset that can be grasped or seized; it is rather a network. Therefore, any reading which seeks analysis of the power should concentrate on implementation of power rather than the level of intentions in consciousness.[11] Indeed, Foucault thinks that the power realises itself not only through a necessity imposed upon those who are not in power, but also by means of trampling the dominated and deriving support from their struggle against the power. Consequently, it may be necessary to understand the power as oppression, restriction and prohibition, but it is not sufficient; we should analyse the truth of power together with its content which produces object areas and truth ceremonies. The relation between knowledge and power should be treated together, since implementation of power does not only reveal new objects of knowledge, but also creates them. Indeed, it is impossible to "implement power without knowledge and it is impossible for the knowledge to exist without paving the way for power."[12]

9   Veli Urhan, *Michel Foucault ve Düşünce Sistemleri Tarihi: Arkeoloji, Soykütüğü, Etik*, Say Yayınları, Istanbul 2013, p. 20.
10 Veli Urhan, *ibid*, p. 203.
11 Madan Sarup, *ibid*, p. 92.
12 Madan Sarup, *ibid*, p. 93.

The foregoing analyses on power push Foucault to the view that the knowledge cannot be evaluated independently from power relationships. More precisely, there is a strict relation between knowledge and power; the two directly include one another; accordingly, it is the formation of a dependent area of knowledge which enables existence of power. In other words, Foucault rejects existence of an objective knowledge domain, saying "no knowledge or knowledge domain, which does not assume and establish power relationships, can exist."[13] His view points out that the relationship between knowledge and power, in a sense, is realised by means of discourses. In the words of Turner, "a discourse may be considered as a combination of power and knowledge which generates objects of knowledge".[14]

In fact, the discourse is a system of possibilities which enables generation of true or false expressions and thus of knowledge domains. Discourses operate in the absence of words and provide necessary prerequisites for formation of expressions; discourses are not a law of method or research, nor can they be considered as a set of rules which we consciously follow. Classification of objects via discourses means acting in a system of possibilities; by means of such system, the fulfilment of certain things is rendered possible and legitimate; moreover, the discourse restricts the people within through such system and things. Indeed, it is impossible to claim that any classification or discourse is right or wrong over everything else. As a matter of fact, there is a partial relationship between the words and the things which they are assumedly represent; this relationship has rooted in discursive rules and dependencies that are impossible to justify and verify on any rational ground.[15]

This Foucauldian approach takes on the idea of representation in the sense of regularity between language and reality. In this regard, the idea of regularity between things and words, or language and reality, is an arbitrary fabrication by discourse so as to constitute its own area of legitimacy.

13 Foucault, *Hapishanenin Doğuşu*, p. 65.
14 Brayn S. Turner, *Oryantalizm, Globalizm, Postmodernizm*, transl. İbrahim Kapaklıkaya, Anka Yayınları 2002, p. 149.
15 Quentin Skinner, *ibid*, pp. 74-75.

In ensuring such legitimacy, certain particular voices and relevant differences are put to a kind of domestication process by means of universal norms established by the discourse.[16] These findings by Foucault reveal that the rational allegations of truth have a fictional content since they do not correspond to any reality; besides, they disclose the content of discourse that constructs and determines the relationship between man and being, man, and things.

In this regard, discourse does not merely correspond to speech, but has an aspect that "produces power relationships and is positioned on historical plane, pointing out to material practices". In this sense, discourses can be considered as a kind of patterns of thought and action which exist within theories and social groups, support and restrict them through genuine information.[17] To exist in a certain discourse determines our object and mode of speech; besides, it provides us with a pattern that enables us to tell the rational from the irrational, the practicable from the impracticable, the believable and obeyable from the unbelievable and unobeyable. In addition, discursive practices, which function within the order of discourse, make us remain within the restrictions of discourse, functioning as a kind of power and supervision through various means.[18]

Discourses determine differences and particular voices within their respective limits; besides, Foucault problematises their content that convinces those within mentioned limits for the same. Accordingly, Foucault opts for a genealogical reading strategy so as to disclose the howness of already occurred relationship of discourse, knowledge and power. Similar to genealogical readings of history by Nietzsche, Foucault's readings defy the approach of unshakable, unique and accumulative history in modernity, as well as the attempts to separate knowledge from power. Accordingly, Foucault adopts and develops the genealogical methodology of Nietzsche and puts forth the central hypothesis, in other words, that the knowledge and the power correspond to the same thing. The path to follow for this purpose

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16 Steven Best & Douglas Kellner, *ibid*, p. 205.

17 Tamsin Spergo, *Foucault ve Kaçıklık Kuramı*, transl. Kaan H. Ökten, Everest Yayınları, Istanbul 2000, p. 75.

18 Yıldırım, Ali Kemal, "Edward Said'in Düşüncelerine Eleştirel Bir Bakış", *Doğu Batı Oryantalizm II*, Issue: 20, 2002 p. 139.

is, above all, to construct origins as collapse, and then to acquire the skill to think on difference rather than similarity, and on external coincidence rather than inner truth. This methodology has a character repugnant to construction of foundations; it is directed towards deconstruction of the united, destructing the stable and reveal heterogeneity of what is considered coherent. According to Foucault, power and knowledge do not operate in a separated manner; on the contrary, they are tools in which the scientific and social practices, the foundation of our beliefs, undergo a process.[19]

From the perspective of Foucault, sexuality, madness and many other categories function as positions of the knowledge produced in a social context. This is why Foucault, by means of genealogy of knowledge/power, tries to prove that the activity of knowing constitutes, indeed, the post of power.[20] In this regard, studies of genealogy also have a political character. The objective of genealogies is to recuperate the particular discourses, knowledge, voices and differences that have been oppressed by applying to totalising narratives throughout history. Indeed, the foregoing dominated discourses are very important with regard to understanding the secret forms of domination, how the power fortifies itself and the current position of power.[21]

According to Foucault, the genealogy by Nietzsche does not understand the history as a research towards the origin. *On the Genealogy of Morality* is not merely a polemic against the values of modern era; it is also against any certain way of constructing the lineage, meaning and origin of these values. A research on origins provides a deceptive research about our knowledge of ourselves. In this respect, genealogy digs the distinction between truth and illusion so as to demonstrate that all our knowledge grounds on injustice. Genealogy does not aim at exploring the origins of human selves. Rather, it looks for the ways of establishing various modes by means of which human beings are created as subjects. Any research on

19 Sarup, Madan, *Identity Culture and The Postmodern World*, ed: Tasneem Raja, Edinburg University Press, Edinburg 1996, p. 72.
20 Appleby, Covington et al, *ibid*, p. 387.
21 Steven Best & Douglas Kellner, *Postmodern Teori*, p. 79.

origins supposes essences and selfdoms.[22] This is why genealogy records
the singularities of historical events together with their all kinds of acci-
dentalness and lack of certitude.[23]

Genealogy shows us how we became what we are and our origin, with-
in a struggle and clash of will-to-power, and not in a complete (coherent)
historical development process.[24] As a matter of fact, according to Fou-
cault, genealogy "undertakes reanalysis of social sphere from a micrologic
perspective that ensures detection of discursive discontinuity and distribu-
tion, as well as comprehension of historical incidents in their real complex-
ity, instead of continuity and identity".[25] Genealogy tries to dismantle the
great chains of historical continuity as well as teleological destinies, and to
historicise the moral thoughts that are considered unchangeable.[26]

The objective of Foucault is to create a history of various modes where-
in men are turned into subjects within the culture; accordingly, the subject
"should not be considered as a knowing, willing, autonomous, self-critical
or – as in Kantian discourse – transcendent subject." Indeed, the subject
should be understood as the cradle of discourses that are multilateral, dis-
persed and cannot be managed through centralisation.[27]

According to Foucault, the difference between the truth experience of
premodern man and the truth experience put forth on the axis of conceptu-
alisation of subject in Cartesian and Kantian philosophies is closely related
with the construction of subject in modern times. During classical period,
under the influence of Platonist perspective, it was out of question that the
man can be opened to truth experience without changing his own mode
of being and only by means of a spiritual transformation. In case Carte-
sian philosophy, in which the scientific practical model plays a significant
part, is taken as a benchmark, it is possible to assert that the subject, upon

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22 Derda Küçükalp, "The Problem of Nihilism in Modern Political Philosophy", *Kaygı*,
    Sayı 15, Güz 2010, p. 83.
23 Pearson, *ibid*, p. 120-121.
24 Pearson, *ibid*, p. 123.
25 Steven Best & Douglas Kellner, *Postmodern Teori*, transl. Mehmet Küçük, Ayrıntı
    Yayınları, Istanbul 1998, p. 66.
26 Steven Best & Douglas Kellner, *Postmodern Teori*, *ibid*, p. 66.
27 Madan Sarup, *ibid*, p. 93.

modern thought, is rendered capable of truth as the subject itself, without any spiritual transformation.[28] In the light of these assessments, Foucault asserts that the elimination of the prerequisite of spiritual transformation to attain the truth is exactly realised by means of Descartes and Kant. So much so that:

In order to be capable of truth, it is sufficient to open the eyes; it is sufficient to express opinion in a safe, straight manner, by adhering to line of proof and never leaving it all through the way. Therefore, the subject does not have to transform itself. It is sufficient that the subject becomes what it has to be in order to attain the truth, to which it opens its own structure as subject, within knowledge.[29]

For sure, together with the mentioned notion of subjects that is capable of knowing the truth, the comprehension of knowledge has totally changed; thereupon, the knowledge is no more comprehended as attaining the truth, but as knowledge of a domain of object; thus, it became possible to substitute the notion of knowledge of object instead of the notion of attaining the truth.[30] In this respect, Foucault talks about their modalities of objectification that transforms modern man into subject:

1- Research modalities which provide themselves the status of science. For example, objectification of the speaking subject in the fields of philology and linguistics. Also in relation with this first modality, the objectification of productive subject, labouring subject in the analysis of wealth and economy. Or, as a third example, the objectification of the simple fact of living within the scope of natural history or biology.

2- Objectification of subject within dividing practices. Subject is divided within itself or others. This process objectifies it. For example, the insane and the sane, the ill and the healthy, or the guilty and the good boys.

3- The manner of self-subjectification of a person.[31]

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28 Foucault, *Öznenin Yorumbilgisi: College de France Dersleri 1981-1982*, transl. Ferda Keskin, Istanbul Bilgi Üniversitesi Yayınları, Istanbul 2015, p. 163.
29 Foucault, *Öznenin Yorumbilgisi*, p. 164.
30 Foucault, *Öznenin Yorumbilgisi*, p. 165.
31 Foucault, "Özne ve İktidar", *Özne ve İktidar*, Seçme Yazılar 2, Ayrıntı Yayınları, İstanbul 2000, p. 58.

In this regard, Foucault thinks that the subject is not given, but is historically constructed within various political and epistemic practices.[32] Critiques by Foucault on conceptualisation of subject are essentially based on the fact that the construction of subject brings along domination. This is why Foucault sets to study the history and consequences of humanities, which make each man an object of domination by means of creating subjects. His relevant works defy the concept of truth in humanities, by bringing an investigation about historical circumstances where their respective discourses have emerged. Foucault's project aspires to dismantle and crash the idealist discourses that claim the entire knowledge has a continuous form explaining human thought and reflecting the truth of things. As Sarup points out, the most positive element in Foucault's works is that they focus on the relationship between institutions and knowledge.[33]

In the eyes of Foucault, the institutions realise their domination on subjects, which they have historically constructed, by means of knowledge. This point reveals a common view among Nietzsche, Foucault and Deleuze. Approaches of Deleuze and Foucault that the power does not only create its objects, but also creates the subjects bear clear similarities with the arguments by Nietzsche that the philosophy is at the service of slaves for 2500 years and that it thus creates several anti-life selfdoms. Foucault is convinced that many things, which are considered as field of knowledge within culture, are not independent of power relationships. Therefore, the power realises its success by means of concealing its mechanisms in various ways. The legal notion of power raises itself by means of institutions such as state, regulations and restrictions (law).[34] Thus, Foucault criticises any kind of general theory for being an attempt to grasp the life through a certain point of view, and develops a relative position because of the close relation between the concepts of truth and power.[35]

According to relative approach of Foucault, the primary problem today, most probably, is to save ourselves from the notion of subject that we

32 May, *ibid*, p. 98.
33 Sarup, *Identity, Culture and The Postmodern World*, p. 70.
34 May, *ibid*, p. 91-93.
35 Sarup, *Post-Yapısalcılık ve Postmodernizm*, p. 121.

have been forced to adopt throughout history, and to validate new forms of subjectivity. In this respect, Foucault considers this to be a political, ethical, as well as a social and philosophical problem; for him, the only way to solve the problem is to escape from the state, as well as the manner of individualisation which is closely related with it.[36]

Foucault defies general social theories such as subject, ideology, state etc. because such theories are actually established to pave way for a kind of normalisation and, in turn, domination. For this reason, Foucault argues against Western humanism which includes historicism, an idea of generalisation in global sense, as well as a notion of progress. Foucault tries to instil the ideas of rupture, discontinuity, displacement and transformation instead of humanism. In his eyes, psychiatry signifies the techniques of disciplines to orientate human behaviours and normalisation processes in the sense of adaptation to a certain way of thinking. In this sense, the function of humanities is to construct subject as the object of knowledge and thus to realise political control. Consequently, the identity ascribed to individual, as well as his character, has to a product of powers operating on the bodies.[37]

Words such as man etc., which we handle within the order things, do not have a being in themselves; on the contrary, for Foucault, we see everything and put everything to an order by means of such structures.[38] As the concept of death of God points out, the mentioned structures and therefore the subject have collapsed upon this death. This point lays the foundation where the ethic pluralism, underlined by modern philosophies, emerges and monist ethic approaches depreciate. As a result, the death of subject is indeed a positive development. Death of subject provides us with possibilities of dialogue, which requires us to see the man on this world as a historical being with all his ephemerality. This perspective can be found in Nietzsche, who considers this world as the only one we can live in, and Foucault, who carries Nietzsche to the modern world. In this regard, antihumanism in Nietzsche and Foucault point out not the refusal of man, but a return to concrete being of man who stands just in the middle of this world with all his differences and singularity.[39]

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36 Foucault, "Özne ve İktidar", p. 68.

37 Sarup, *Identity, Culture and The Postmodern World*, p. 69.

38 Appleby, Covington et al, *Knowledge and Postmodernism in Historical Perspective*, p. 408.

39 Falzon, Christopher, Foucault ve Sosyal Diyalog, transl. Hüsamettin Arslan, Paradigma, Istanbul 2001, p. 22.

Öz

Farklılığa Açılmanın İmkanı Olarak Jeneoloji: Foucault'un Güç ve Tahakküm Eleştirisi

Genelde Batı düşüncesinin özelde ise söz konusu düşüncenin pratik bir tezahürü olan ahlak anlayışlarının soy kütüğünü çıkararak, hakikat iddiasıyla güç ilişkileri arasındaki bağlantıyı ifşa etme çabasının, Nietzsche felsefesinden itibaren Batı düşüncesinin merkezi tartışmalarından birisi olduğunu söylemek mümkündür. Bu çalışmanın sınırlarını da tayin ettiği şekliyle bu tartışma, hakikat iddialarının nasıl olup da belirli güçlerin çıkarına hizmet ettiği ve bu güçlerin hâkimiyetindeki bir yaşamı meşrulaştırmak suretiyle farklılıkları baskı altına alıcı bir fonksiyon gördüğü üzerinde yoğunlaşmaktadır. Bilgi ve hakikat iddialarıyla tahakkümün meşrulaştırılması ve böylece farklılıkların yadsınması meselesi, Foucault'nun düşüncelerinin de merkezi ilgisini oluşturur. Foucault da, bir Nietzscheci olarak jeneoloji yöntemini modern topluma uygulayarak, modern toplumdaki bilgi-iktidar ilişkisine bağlı tahakküm ilişkilerinin izini sürer.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Foucault, Jeneoloji, Farklılık, Güç, Bilgi, Söylem, Tahakküm

Abstract

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It is possible to claim that efforts to reveal the connection between allegations of truth and power relationships by means of establishing a genealogy of moral which is the practical embodiment of Western thought in general and the mentioned approach in particular, have become one of the most debated issues in Western philosophy as of Nietzsche. Such discussion, which also constitutes the framework of hereby study, concentrates on how the allegations of truth serve in favour of interests of certain powers and as an oppressive function through legitimisation of life under domination of such powers. The legitimisation of domination via allegations of knowledge and truth, as well as subsequent disregard of differences, constitutes the central axis of Foucault's philosophy. As a Nietzschean, Foucault applies the method of genealogy on the society and traces the relations of domination in connection with knowledge-power relation in modern society.

Keywords: Foucault, Genealogy, Difference, Power, Knowledge, Discourse, Domination

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