

The Meaning and Context of the Concept of Decadence in the Philosophy of Friedrich Nietzsche

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Friedrich Nietzsche dealt intensively with the concept of decadence only in his last creative year, 1888, but broadly speaking, he dealt with the problem of decadence throughout his entire career. Ever since *The Birth of Tragedy*, the conviction that European civilisation was in decline, and the vital search for a new rise permeated Nietzsche's works.

This article has five interrelated goals. Firstly, I try to delineate the main meanings of the concept of decadence in Nietzsche's thinking. Secondly, I present the genealogy of decadence as a phenomenon in Nietzsche's thought and try to interpret some of the related problems. However, the main philosophical ambition of the article unfolds in the following two goals. Thirdly, at the end of the distinction, I present a complete interpretation of Nietzsche's concept of decadence, in which I try to dynamically integrate the different shades of meaning of the term. Fourthly, in the course of the article, I will present a brief sketch of the relationship between the concept of decadence and some other problems in Nietzsche's philosophy that are essential for creating a context: the general economy of power and weakness (will to power); the nature of self; and the connection of affectivity (drives-instincts) with the previous two questions. According to my conviction, it is not possible to understand Nietzsche's concept of decadence by narrowly isolating it – his decadence-delineations inevitably involve several major themes, which I try to mark in the article. I also delineate the request to overcome decadence in Nietzsche's philosophy and the criticism of modern researchers regarding this request. The last goal of the article is to highlight a historical connection between Nietzsche's concept of decadence and Estonian culture. At the end of the article, I describe the case of how Nietzsche's criticism of decadence was used as a political weapon in the early years of the first period of independence of the Republic of Estonia. I also reconstruct the main arguments of the parties to the dispute at that time.

In the article, I distinguish four shades of meaning of the concept of decadence: 1) decadence as a natural purification system of individuals and societies; 2) decadence as a pathology, a sign of weak instincts; 3) decadence as an expression of idealistic morality's stance against life; 4) decadence as the general nature of modernity. Although I come to the conclusion that weakness of instincts is the main meaning of the Nietzschean conception of decadence, I try to show that there is no need to minimise other shades of meaning. All the meanings of decadence form a dynamic whole in Nietzsche's philosophy. As a basis for that interpretation, I apply the model of three different voices (vital, perspectivist, observer), which I consider to be the key to shaping an understanding of Nietzsche's philosophy as a whole that excludes one-way readings.