

# Genealogy of Belief

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Week One: Introduction

## 1. The Genealogy of Genealogy

Mortals suppose that the gods are born (as they themselves are), and that they wear man's clothing and have human voice and body. But if cattle or lions had hands, so as to paint with their hands and produce works of art as men do, they would paint their gods and give them bodies in form like their own—horses like horses, cattle like cattle (Xenophanes 1898, fragments 5-6)

Genealogy as pedigree tracing, vindicatory and the search for *Ursprung* vs Genealogy as shameful, the search for *Herkunft*

Ancient shameful genealogies: Xenophanes, Herodotus, Protagoras, Lucretius

Early modern vindicatory genealogies: Locke and Hobbes

Early modern shameful genealogies: Hume, Hobbes, Tolland

German historicism: Herder, Humboldt, Dilthey, Weber (cf. Hegel, Marx)

[The historicist] recognize[s] that everything in the human world – culture, values, institutions, practices, rationality – is made by history, so that nothing has an eternal form, permanent essence or constant identity which transcends historical change. The historicist holds, therefore, that the essence, identity or nature of everything in the human world is made by history, so that it is entirely the product of the particular historical processes that brought it into being...Hence the historicist is the Heraclitean of the human world: everything is in flux; no one steps twice into the river of history (Beiser 2011, 2).

Nietzsche's *On the genealogy of morals*

20th + 21st centuries: Historical epistemology (Foucault); feminist, subaltern, psychoanalytic unmaking; Sam Moyn's debunking of human rights.

Analytic philosophy: from dismissal (the genetic fallacy) to enthrallment – genealogical debunking of morality (Harman, Singer, Gibbard, Kitcher, Joyce, Street, Greene, Huemer, Rosenberg); evolutionary debunking of metaphysics (Ladyman and Ross); genealogical debunking of mathematical Platonism (Benacceraf, Field); evo debunking of theism (Dennett); evo debunking of naturalism (Plantinga); x-phi debunking of philosophy.

## 2. Epistemology of Genealogical Debunking

Can genealogical debunkers identify a non-*ad hoc* epistemological principle that will secure the inference from genealogy to doxastic defeat without over-generalising into scepticism? Is a radically luck-tolerant externalist epistemology the right response to genealogical anxiety?

## 3. Genealogical Debunking of Philosophy

Does genealogical debunking of philosophical intuitions risks a form of a *posteriori* self-defeat, appealing to epistemological intuitions that are themselves genealogically contingent? Is there a form of x-phi that can resist the lure of metaphilosophical Archimedeanism?

## 4. What else might genealogy be and do

How are Williams' and Craig's vindicatory genealogies supposed to work? Did Nietzsche and Foucault have a genealogical 'method'? Were they seeking to debunk beliefs, or do something else? What does it mean for genealogy to be 'preparatory'? Can genealogy function as (Kantian) critique? Can there be a philosophically interesting non-normative genealogy?

## 5. Genealogy, perspective and reality

Does reflecting on the contingency of our language and theoretical values compel us, as Putnam argued, toward a general metaphysical anti-realism? Is such a view merely self-defeating, or does it show us something about limits of human understanding?

## 6. Genealogy, ethics and tradition

Is Rorty right that the good liberal should be an ironist, or is Williams right that Rortyan irony is a response to a non-problem? Does Hegelian magnanimity offer a satisfying response to genealogical anxiety? Do any of these views leave room for radical political innovation?