

Nietzsche and Genealogy

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Truth and Truthfulness

Traditional theories of truth:

- 1 Correspondence Theory (what makes a belief true is its correspondence to a state in the world)
- 2 Coherence Theory (what makes a belief true is the coherence of the belief system of which it is a part)
- 3 Pragmatist Theory (truth is the end of inquiry; truth is satisfactory to believe)

You may be a realist or an anti-realist (Michael Dummett) about truth. Deflationists about truth think that there is no metaphysical substance in the truth predicate because the proposition X and the proposition “X is true” are equivalent.

Raymond Geuss: Nietzsche and Genealogy

If Nietzsche clearly attacks the correspondence view, shows no interest in coherence, and seems to present no clear alternative of his own invention, then he must tacitly hold some kind of reductivist or pragmatist view [according to Habermas]. The most fruitful way of taking Nietzsche seems to me to see him not as trying to propound his own variant theory of truth, but as formulating a new question "How and why does the will-to-truth come about?" (and claiming that this question is more interesting than, and doesn't presuppose an antecedent answer to Plato's question "What is truth?"). (8)

Truth and Truthfulness

It is difficult to keep the things that Nietzsche says about truth consistent. On the one hand, Williams lauds his attachment to the truth in so far as Nietzsche resists the cowardice of believing errors. On the other hand, Nietzsche is famously dismissive of objective and metaphysical truth.

Williams appears to be distinguishing between an attitude of **truthfulness**, which is willing to believe something that is not useful or happymaking; and **truth**, about whose origins there may be a genealogy.

Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, 167

We should not reinterpret the exceedingly derivative, late, rare, accidental, that we perceive only on the crust of the earth and make of it something essential, universal, and eternal.

Key points about Nietzsche's attitude towards truth.

- “fundamental insight: there is no pre-established harmony between the furthering of truth and the well-being of humanity” (does Nietzsche's view of truth square with his will to power monism?)
- “it is still a metaphysical faith upon which our faith in science rests”
- “error is not blindness—error is cowardice”
- nothing is really identical, all identity is a fiction (17)
- “the antithesis of the apparent world and the true world is reduced to the antithesis world and nothing”

Michel Foucault: Histoire de la sexualité, page 113

C'est à la condition de masquer une part importante de lui-même que le pouvoir est tolérable. Sa réussite est en proportion de ce qu'il parvient à cacher de ses mécanismes. Le pouvoir serait-il accepté s'il était entièrement cynique? Le secret n'est pas pour lui de l'ordre de l'abus: il est indispensable à son fonctionnement.

Bernard Williams: Truth and Truthfulness, 28

A genealogy is a narrative that tries to explain a cultural phenomenon by describing a way in which it came about . . . Our ethical ideas are a complex deposit of many different traditions and social forces, and they have themselves been shaped by self-conscious representations of that history. However, the impact of these historical processes is to some extent concealed by the ways in which their product thinks of itself.

Michel Foucault: Nietzsche, Genealogy, History, 142

However, if the genealogist refuses to extend his faith in metaphysics, if he listens to history, he finds that there is “something altogether different” behind things: not a timeless and essential secret, but the secrets that they have no essence or that their essence was fabricated in a piecemeal fashion from alien forms.

In the context of Hume's account of moral responsibility, genealogy denotes the kind of explanation pointing to the origins of a social practice of which it is essential that they themselves are not used as reasons to follow the practice. The core of the practice is somehow constituted by a certain forgetfulness toward its history. The forgetfulness is at the root of lending the practice intrinsic rather than instrumental value: a value which becomes detached from the original usefulness of the practice; also a value which experiences a threat to its reflective stability, and possibly a breakdown, when its historical origins are uncovered.

Here are some examples for cultural phenomena (it may be very controversial whether these really are cultural phenomena!) that have been submitted to genealogies:

- ① truth (Friedrich Nietzsche)
- ② justice (David Hume)
- ③ morality (Friedrich Nietzsche)
- ④ gender (Judith Butler)
- ⑤ knowledge (Michel Foucault, Archaeology of Knowledge)
- ⑥ love (the prairie vole)
- ⑦ soul (Michel Foucault, The Body of the Condemned)

Prairie Voles and Montane Voles

- Prairie voles mate for life, and montane voles do not.
- Among prairie voles, the males not only share parenting duties, they will even lick and nurture pups that aren't their own.
- By contrast, male montane voles do not actively parent even their own offspring.

What accounts for the difference? Researchers have found that the prairie voles have greater numbers of oxytocin receptors in certain regions of the brain. Prairie voles that have had their oxytocin receptors blocked will not pair-bond. An object lesson in neuro-philosophy?

State of Nature Stories

State of nature stories operate on simplified, imaginary environments.

- justice (D. Hume)
- state (R. Nozick)
- knowledge (E.J. Craig)
- truth (B. Williams)
- morality? (F. Nietzsche)

The state of nature is not the pleistocene. What characterizes humans naturalistically is their massive potential for non-genetic learning.

In 1902, Rudyard Kipling published a book called *Just So Stories*. The term was appropriated in a derogatory fashion to discredit various types of evolutionary hypothesis about adaptation. The problem is usually that the hypothesis comes without means of empirical falsification.

	sons	daughters
general-status mother	2.8	1.7
low-status mother	2.3	2.6

Trivers-Willard hypothesis. Williams makes the point that just-so stories may be fact-defective, but that doesn't automatically make them law-defective.

Function and Explanation

A property (such as altruism or other collaborative dispositions) may function to make individuals and the societies in which they live more fit. Williams correctly points out that functional accounts are not explanations. They lack historical plausibility since rational deliberation about the value of a property in the development of this property would beg the question. The prisoner dilemma illustrates this problem formally.

One way in which evolutionary psychology may overcome this problem is by introducing intrinsic (versus instrumental) goals. A parent does not come to the aid of a child because the well-being of the child is of instrumental value (in order to promote the gene propagation of near kin); the well-being of the child is of intrinsic value. This leads to a genealogy, which may either be vindictory (Nozick: state) or non-vindictory (Nietzsche: morality).

Truth and Truthfulness

Williams' genealogy of truthfulness turns out to be vindictory, and it entails that correspondence to facts is of intrinsic value.

truth metaphysical, not historical

sincerity historical, instrumental

truthfulness historical, intrinsic

Salvator Mundi: Pedigree or Genealogy



Salvator Mundi: Pedigree or Genealogy

- ❶ Louis XII of France (around 1500)
- ❷ Henrietta Maria (wife of Charles I of England, around 1625)
- ❸ John Stone (1651, for perhaps as little as 30 pounds)
- ❹ returned to Charles II of England (English Restoration, 1660)
- ❺ ... (third wives, illegitimate children, etc.) ...
- ❻ George III (1763)
- ❼ ... painting disappears ...
- ❽ Francis Cook (1900)
- ❾ sold for 45 pounds in 1958, painting disappears again
- ❿ Robert Simon purchases the painting for \$10,000 in 2005 at an auction in New Orleans
- ⓫ Swiss dealer Yves Bouvier purchases the painting for \$75,000,000 in 2013
- ⓬ Dmitry Rybolovlev immediately purchases the painting for \$127,500,000
- ⓭ Mohammed bin Salman purchases the painting for \$450,312,500 in 2017

These are characteristic features of a pedigree, to be contrasted with a genealogy according to Raymond Geuss.

- positive valorization
- linearity
- singular origin

As opposed to a pedigree of Christianity, in a genealogy of Christianity there

- are diverse lines of development (a synthesis)
- is a migration of concepts (the debtor-creditor relationship)
- is a history “doused in blood” (i.e. violent and oppressive)
- are contingencies (breaks, leaps, and coercions, GM II, 17)
- are individuals (Paul) and collectives (the Church, the mendicants) who impress their interpretation on a tradition (Foucault makes collective wills more precise with his theory of microdominations)
- self-contradictions that lead to eventual demise (compare Marx’ dialectical materialism)

Choose from the following options. This item will be graded.

iClicker Question

[1231] Which relationship develops on the basis of promisekeeping in Nietzsche's genealogy of morality?

- A ▶ oligarch-plutocrat
- B ▶ infantry-cavalry
- C ▶ debtor-creditor
- D ▶ matrix-meretrix

Choose from the following options. This item will be graded.

iClicker Question

[6033] Fill in the blank: “if a doctor had treated a . . . for serious internal inflammations which would drive the European with the stoutest constitution to distraction; – the do *not* do that to the . . .”

- A ▶ Eskimo
- B ▶ Muscovite
- C ▶ Negro
- D ▶ Extraterrestrial

Choose from the following options. This item will be graded.

iClicker Question

[1507] Which words does Foucault use to illuminate the concept of genealogy?

- A ▶ genèse, origine, provenance
- B ▶ originem, formatio, cunabula
- C ▶ diathesis, syntaxis, katastasis
- D ▶ Ursprung, Entstehung, Herkunft

Choose from the following options. This item will be graded.

iClicker Question

[4256] In Foucault's paper "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History," what kind of history is in contrast to traditional history?

- A ▶ Gender history
- B ▶ effective history
- C ▶ poststructural history
- D ▶ Marxist history