

**Advanced Topics in Moral, Political & Legal Philosophy**  
**THE EPISTEMOLOGY OF ETIOLOGICAL/GENEALOGICAL CRITIQUES:**  
**CONTEMPORARY & HISTORICAL**

**Winter 2016**  
**Michael Forster and Brian Leiter**  
**Room B, Law School**  
**Thursdays, 4-6 pm**

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**Description:**

Anglophone epistemology has recently become interested in the question whether the *origin* of our beliefs matters to their *acceptability* or *justification*. The intuitive thought is simple: If you had been brought up in a different family, or a different culture, or at a different time, your moral, religious, and philosophical beliefs (among any others) would likely have been very different than they are. Shouldn't that make us wonder whether we are really justified in believing what we believe? Should the origin or historical contingency of our beliefs and values make us skeptical about them, or lead us to revise them? Many historical figures have thought so: in different ways, Herder, Marx, and Nietzsche. Many recent Anglophone philosophers think not: they ask what epistemological principle would license a localized skepticism about certain beliefs without having far-reaching implications? When does the etiology of belief matter epistemically and when does it not? We begin by looking at contemporary approaches to this question in the recent Anglophone literature, then turn to the important historical figures concerned with these issues.

**Requirements:**

- (1) Attendance at *all* classes.
- (2) One 10-15 page paper on a topic chosen in consultation with the instructor(s) (longer for JD students seeking writing credit—please consult Leiter).

**Tentative list of reading assignments (we have 9 sessions):**

**1. January 7: Etiology poses an epistemological problem I**

Readings: G.A. Cohen, "Paradoxes of Conviction," Ch. 1 of *If You're an Egalitarian, How Come You're So Rich?* (Harvard University Press, 2000), pp. 7-19; B. Leiter, "The Hermeneutics of Suspicion: Recovering Marx, Nietzsche, Freud," in *The Future for Philosophy* (Oxford, 2004), pp. 103-105 (both available on Chalk).

**2. January 14: Etiology poses an epistemological problem II**

Reading: Sharon Street, "A Darwinian Dilemma for Realist Theories of Value," *Philosophical Studies* 127 (2006): 109-166. Useful, not required: Brian Leiter, "Moral Facts and Best Explanations," *Social Philosophy & Policy* 18 (2001): 79-101 (available on Chalk); Katia Vavova, "Debunking Evolutionary Debunking," in R. Shafer-Landau (ed.), *Oxford Studies in Metaethics* 9 (OUP, 2014).

**3. January 21: Etiology does not pose an epistemological problem I**

Reading: Roger White, "You Just Believe That Because...," *Philosophical Perspectives* 24 (2010): 573-615.

**4. January 28: Etiology does not pose an epistemological problem II**

Reading: Amia Sreenivasan, "The Archimidean Urge" (forthcoming).

**5. February 4: Etiology matters: a rejoinder**

Readings: Juan DiPaolo & Robert Simpson, "Indoctrination anxiety and the etiology of belief," *Synthese* (forthcoming); also read pp. 1179-1188 of Leiter, "Marx, Law, Ideology, Legal Positivism," *Virginia Law Review* (2015) (on Chalk).

**6. February 11: Herder & Hegel**

Readings: Herder, *Philosophical Writings* (ed. Forster), pp. 52-64 (excerpt from *Fragments*) and pp. 272-358 (*This Too a Philosophy of History*); Hegel, Preface and "Self-Consciousness" chapter from the *Phenomenology of Spirit* (all available on Chalk). Take a look also at the first few pages of the two papers by Forster on Chalk ("Ideology" and "Genealogy and Morality").

**7. February 18: Marx**

Reading: Marx, "The German Ideology"; Forster, "Ideology" (on Chalk).

**8. February 25: Nietzsche**

Readings: Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality*, Preface and First Treatise; Leiter, *Nietzsche on Morality*, Chapter 5 (on Chalk); Forster, "Genealogy and Morality" (on Chalk).

**9. March 3: Freud**

Readings: *The Interpretation of Dreams*, chs. 2-4; *The Psychopathology of Everyday Life*, chs. 1-3, 5, and 12.