

BOOK REVIEW

Brian Lightbody, *Philosophical Genealogy I: An epistemological reconstruction of Nietzsche and Foucault's Genealogical Method* (New York: Peter Lang Publishing Inc., 2010).

In Volume One of *Philosophical Genealogy: An Epistemological Reconstruction of Nietzsche and Foucault's Genealogical Method*, Brian Lightbody uses epistemological reconstruction to analyze the genealogical works of Foucault and Nietzsche. He argues that such an undertaking is merited due to a lack of scholarly consensus on genealogy, despite myriad extent criticisms. He writes “without answering what, precisely, genealogy is, one cannot criticize it in any lucid nor detailed manner” (5). Lightbody argues what is needed is nothing short of a schema that details the aims, methods and techniques of genealogy. In doing so, however, Lightbody also seeks to break with the extent literature on genealogy in another fashion, as he writes “what I propose to do is to use the techniques, distinctions and concepts developed in recent analytic philosophy to show that we can have our cake and eat it too. We can provide a rigorous justification of genealogy while preserving its novelty, its profundity, its fecundity” (5).

To start, Lightbody contrasts genealogy to what he deems “traditional forms of historiography”—monumental history from Nietzsche’s *Untimely Meditations* and whig historiography (7). This section of the text suffers from the choice of examples. Although Lightbody identifies Francis Fukuyama and Hegel as potential candidates of influential whig historians, it is unclear to me who would qualify as an influential monumental historian. If these methods are anachronistic, then it makes little sense to qualify genealogy against them, rather than other methods used by contemporary historians or philosophers.

In the next section, Lightbody develops a set of points that seem crucial for his argument that genealogy is an epistemically justified method, and that Nietzsche and Foucault are both practitioners of it in a similar fashion. As stated in the preface, genealogy, while concerned with value, is not a kind of value theory, and as Lightbody writes “though value theory and ethics are often regarded as closely synonymous if not co-extensive terms by many philosophers, it should be made clear at the outset that genealogy’s investigation into the value or values is not limited merely to the ethical realm” (ix). Lightbody argues that genealogy is concerned with more than just ethics, and, following Foucault, identifies power and truth as central concerns for a

genealogist. Power, truth and ethics are the three categories that Lightbody organizes his discussion around, and he claims that they hold for Nietzsche as well. He also introduces some important qualifications, narrowing his discussion of Foucault to the works produced between 1971-1980, and identifying *On the Genealogy of Morals* as the primary site of Nietzsche's oeuvre to which this work refers (21).

Lightbody turns our attention to Nietzsche's remarks about Herbert Spencer¹ and points out that in order to be both logically consistent and critical of other historians, Nietzsche must consider genealogy to be "epistemically meritorious" in reference to other historical methods (33). Lightbody considers the importance of this quotation to be under-estimated in secondary literature on genealogy, and in the second and third chapters, analyzes how the issue of epistemic merit relates to both ontological and epistemological problems of the body, and then further argues for the coherence of Nietzsche's perspectivism. One section which merits further attention is called "Optical Perspectivism," and the subject is Nietzsche's infamous ocular metaphor of perspective.² In this section Lightbody provides a fascinating criticism of another analytic philosopher, Brian Leiter. Lightbody argues that genealogy is able to use both "doxastic and non-doxastic" evidence, and in doing so moves beyond questions of motive, intention and sentiment (54). From this standpoint, he criticizes Leiter's use of Wittgenstein's concept of 'forms of life' as a comparison to Nietzsche's understanding of how context relates to interpretations and facts. Lightbody argues that the poverty of Wittgenstein's 'forms of life' is that it allows community standards to operate as an unquestionable given. In Lightbody's words: "the contextualist does not provide a non-doxastic (or casual) account of truth. Surely, a proper epistemology must take into account the non-doxastic as well as the doxastic aspects of any form of empirical inquiry [...] In essence, Leiter's modest objectivity is *too* modest because it could only represent the squint, the nook, the corner, the *slug* perspective of the herd—the insight of the common" (129-130). A genealogist cannot allow community standards to operate as non-interrogable contexts as this would fly in the face of the goal of the method. In Lightbody's words, "it must be possible to justify the accuracy of some perspectives over others and it must also be possible to affirm that perspectives are creative, and dynamic interpretations and re-interpretations of the world" (131).

In the fourth chapter, Lightbody analyzes the methods and techniques of the second essay of *On the Genealogy of Morals* and the chapter "The means of correct training" in *Discipline and Punish*. He demonstrates that both Nietzsche and Foucault use a combination of evidence in the present time and distinct historical methods, and rely on neither exclusively. He claims that Nietzsche's will to power is "both a metaphysical doctrine and constitutive of an empirical research program: it can be tested" (148). Through this discussion, Lightbody argues that Nietzsche and Foucault's genealogical investigations share a high degree of similarity, that they

¹ Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Genealogy of Morals*, translated by Walter Kaufmann and RJ Hollindale (New York: Random House INC, 1989), First Essay, Section 3, 27.

² *Ibid.*, Third Essay, Section 12, 119.

share a research method in “empirically verifiable, and, therefore, empirically falsifiable terms” (182). To my knowledge, this is high praise for the genealogical method from an analytic philosopher.

Some might consider a book on Foucault and Nietzsche to be a scholastic exercise. They are, it seems to me, not the intended audience of this book. *Philosophical Genealogy* is a book for the naysayers—those who associate thinkers like Nietzsche and Foucault with obscurity and irrationality. Lightbody’s work certainly moves beyond summary, as he claims, and treats with depth and insight the issues that surround an epistemological justification of genealogy. Lightbody provides a nuanced attempt at reconstructing a schema of the genealogical method and in the process develops an interesting account of genealogy as “a naturalistic account of historical events and phenomena” (184). Certainly the text merits further attention from scholars interested in genealogy, or those interested in the ontological and epistemological problems associated with Foucault and Nietzsche’s work.

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