

Collegium Helveticum

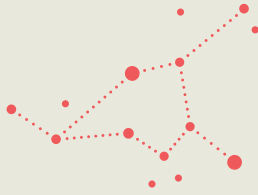
Ludwik Fleck Zentrum

Prof. Dr.
Lorraine Daston

Friday, October 19, 2018, 18:15–19:45

Fleck Lecture 2018

What is the Source of Nature's Moral Authority?



In many cultures and epochs, natural orders have been invoked by revolutionaries and reactionaries alike as support for various political, social, and moral order: the stately movements of the stars served the ancient Stoics as the model of the good life; revolutionaries in Enlightenment America and France appealed to nature's universal laws to justify rebellion; homosexuality has been condemned as "against nature"; recent floods and storms prompt headlines about the "revenge of nature" taken upon human greed and thoughtlessness. Yet for centuries philosophers such as Hume, Kant, and John Stuart Mill have argued that nature has no moral authority; nature simply is, and it is an error of logic to infer an "ought" from an "is." These calls to drive a wedge between natural and moral orders has gone largely unheeded, as current debates about genetically modified organisms, new reproductive technologies, and homosexual marriage testify. Why do we continue to seek moral authority in nature, despite learned advice to the contrary?

Lorraine Daston was educated at Harvard (A.B. 1973) and Cambridge (Dipl. 1974) Universities, and received a Ph.D. in the History of Science from Harvard (1979). Since 1995 she has been Director at the Max Planck Institute for the History of Science and Honorary Professor in Berlin; since 2005 she has been Visiting Professor in the Committee on Social Thought at the University of Chicago. At the Max Planck Institute she has organized research projects on the history of demonstration and proof, the varieties of scientific experience, the moral authority of nature, and the common languages of art and science.

**Date**

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**Speaker**

Prof. Dr. Lorraine Daston
[Director of Max Planck Institute
for the History of Science Berlin
and Professor at University of
Chicago]

**Venue**

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