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Professor Hubbs

Phil 490

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Response Essay 1 – Reading: On the Genealogy of Morality

“That the lambs feel anger toward the great birds of prey does not strike us as odd: but that is no reason for holding it against the great birds of prey that they snatch up little lambs for themselves. And when the lambs say among themselves ‘these birds of prey are evil; and whoever is as little as possible a bird of prey but rather its opposite, a lamb,—isn’t he good?’ there is nothing to criticize in this setting up of an ideal, even if the birds of prey should look on this a little mockingly and perhaps say to themselves: ‘we do not feel any anger towards them, these good lambs, as a matter of fact, we love them: nothing is more tasty than a tender lamb.’” (Nietzsche 25).

Here, Nietzsche is saying that it makes sense to us that the lambs would have anger towards the birds of prey; however, this is not a reason to be against what the birds of prey do. He then says that the lambs establish the birds of prey as evil because they possess physical power over them and that they, the lambs, are good because of their powerlessness. He further adds that the birds of prey might even give in to the lambs’ framing of morality to mock them because they can afford to do so due to their state of physical dominance over the lambs.

This situation described by Nietzsche made me think and ask: How accurately is Nietzsche evaluating the power of the nobles and the slaves represented, respectively, through the birds of prey and lambs? I agree with Nietzsche that it is quite clear that the birds of prey hold physical power over the lambs. Nietzsche does also assess that slave morality has triumphed over the morality of the nobles, and his explanation as to why appears plausible. However, another aspect of power I did not see him recognize or emphasize (and that his example of the relationship between the birds of prey and the lambs made me start to think about) was the degree to which one class needs the other. By definition, dependence is powerlessness, and it is evident that the birds of prey need the lambs much more than the lambs need the birds of prey. Without the lambs, the birds of prey would simply starve. Likewise, the masters cannot be masters if they have no slaves to dominate. I am curious to know how Nietzsche would respond to this.