Andrew Plum

Professor Hubbs

Phil 490

3/3/2025

Response Essay 6 – Reading: The Practical Origins of Ideas

“On the reading of this passage… justice is unmasked as being nothing but a means to an egoistic end, and if we exhibit it even when it does not align with self-interest, it is only because we are forgetful. Were we not so forgetful, we would be more consistently egoistic, and the world would see a lot less non-egoistic or moral behaviour…

But there is also a different reading… the emancipation from practical origins achieved by forgetfulness was a *causally necessary* step in the development of non-egoistic behaviour, but without being an essential constituent of the product… Nietzsche’s point is only that much of the non-egoistic behaviour… would never have arisen had we always concentrated on the motive at its practical origin. Forgetfulness about practical origins is a way of severing the intimate connection between justice and self-preservation, thereby allowing justice to develop into something potentially far removed from its practical origins” (Queloz 114, 115).

Here, Queloz discusses two interpretations that are possible of Nietzsche’s genealogy being either subversive or vindicatory. In the subversive interpretation, forgetfulness serves to reveal that justice is used to reach an egoistic end. If we remembered the origins of justice, then we would be more self-interested. In the vindicatory interpretation, forgetting the origins of justice was crucial for selfless behavior to come into fruition. The latter interpretation says that selfless behavior would not have come about if we were not forgetful of the origins of justice. Forgetting justice’s self-preservation origins allows justice to evolve into something new and different from what it was before.

Given the two interpretations Queloz outlines, how can we be confident one is more correct than the other? What are the ways in which we can conclude one interpretation is correct? To definitively affirm one interpretation over the other, we would need to understand how the origins of justice impact the current use of the concept, if at all. Is there the possibility of there being a spectrum between the two interpretations where the origins of justice impact the current use of the concept to different degrees? Do both interpretations have value being applied in different situations? If that is the case, does that mean that one shouldn’t necessarily be favored over the other since the unity of both interpretations has a greater use than either one individually? Queloz does believe that Nietzsche’s genealogy is vindicatory, which is the opposite of what I would have initially thought since he seemed to be using genealogy to critique and undermine the authority of traditional morality. Even though I have now seen the arguments for both interpretations, I am still contemplating which one Nietzsche would have of his genealogy and the implications that follow.