

Notes on Rosen Chapter 1
Dunster House Faculty Dean Residence
2nd Floor Office
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7:00 a.m.

To begin with, here's an outline of the sections in chapter 1.

1. Introduction: A Not So Secular Age? (1-27)
 - 1.1. A Spy Story (1-3)
 - 1.2. Secularization (3-6)
 - 1.3. Faith and Reason (6-7)
 - 1.4. Posterity (7-8)
 - 1.5. The Church Invisible (9-10)
 - 1.6. Freedom (10-12)
 - 1.7. Hegel and Religion (12-15)
 - 1.8. Philosophies as Forms of Life (15-20)
 - 1.9. The Threat of Nihilism (20)
 - 1.10. With and against Hegel (20-21)
 - 1.11. A Summary and a Few Remarks (22-26)
 - 1.12. Texts and Translations (26-27)

Overview

This is the first chapter of Michael Rosen's book *The Shadow of God: Kant, Hegel, and the Passage from Heaven to History*. The chapter presents the overall project of the book. It does so by a preliminary consideration of a wide range of primary source passages. Major figures under consideration include philosophers from Leibniz, Spinoza, and Hume to Rousseau, Kant, Schelling, Hegel, Marx, Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, James, Schmitt, and Adorno; literary figures highlighted include Schiller, Goethe, Heine, and Matthew Arnold. Over the course of the book, Michael intends to return to these passages to deepen his interpretation of them. One highlight of his overall approach is that it sees *secularism* as both the origin of German Idealism and what German Idealism, paradoxically and despite itself, brings further into fruition. At the beginning of the story is Kant's need, in the face of a natural disaster like the Lisbon earthquake of 1755, to tell a story that *justifies* God's rewarding the virtuous and punishing the wicked. Interestingly, there doesn't seem to be any question *whether* God metes out the relevant rewards and punishments. Instead, the question (typical of Kant) is What must be the case to make sense of the fact that He does? The answer is twofold. First, we must be *free* to act as we do. God's reward and punishment wouldn't be justified if we hadn't been free to do the things we did. Second, the rewards and punishments meted out for our actions must be *intelligible* to us. If we couldn't, even in principle, understand why we were being rewarded or punished, then God's actions would be unjust, and his goodness would be brought into question. Starting from these observations, Michael goes on to tell a story about a variety of notions – including self-transcendence, freedom, history, justification, religion, the Church Invisible, the *corpus mysticum*, and others – whose meanings transform over the course of the period in question. It is partly because central philosophical concepts like these have the history that they do, I think, that Michael is so committed to the idea that philosophy and history must be done in tandem.

Now, let's say something about each of the sections.

1.1 A Spy Story (1-3)

Summary

The structure of a spy story tells you, on Jonathan Wolff's account, something about the structure of a good work of philosophy. The lesson comes by contrasting the two. Whereas a spy story reveals its plot slowly over time, until the whole thing finally comes together at the end, a philosopher begins with the conclusion and then sets out to prove it. Michael seems to disagree with Wolff's account of our discipline. [Is this correct?] Philosophy is, on his view, a "mystery tour: the aim is to change the understanding of what is otherwise taken for granted" (p. 2). Moreover, philosophy is deeply intertwined with history: "[N]ot only is the history of philosophy itself philosophical, but philosophical history, I believe, represents the most fruitful way of understanding some of the deepest and most perplexing issues that face us – as philosophers and as citizens" (p. 3).

Interesting Passages Cited

1. As Hume worries, "by what criterion shall I distinguish [truth], even if fortune should at last guide me on her foot-steps?" [*Treatise*, Book I, Part IV, Section 7 (p. 265 in Selby-Bigge)]
2. "For whatever one might properly say about philosophy in a preface and in whatever way one might say it – for example, a historical statement of its tendency and standpoint, its general content and results, a network of randomly pointing assertions and assurances about truth – none of this can be accepted as the way in which to present philosophical truth."
[*Phenomenology of Spirit*, ¶1]

Questions

What is the contrast, exactly, between a spy story and philosophy? Isn't a spy story meant to change the understanding of what is taken for granted as well? We may be led to think, for instance, that the man with the bad haircut in the opening scene is being kidnapped, but by the end we realize he was being saved. Does it change our understanding in a *different way*, then, than philosophy does? Or does it change our understanding of something else, something *other than what is taken for granted*, for instance? Even if I take it for granted that the man with the bad haircut is being kidnapped, and later come to discover he was being saved, is that the *kind* of thing about which philosophy aims to change our understanding? Is that the difference? **What exactly is the difference between a whodunnit and a mystery tour?** What notion of philosophy is Michael hinting at? And ultimately, why does it require a relation to its own history?

Comments

Anyhow, suppose that philosophy does bring about a change in the understanding. Suppose it aims to bring us from a state of understanding X by A to a state of understanding Y by A. How is it to do this? One cannot evidently, as Wolff proposes, announce the conclusion at the start and then fill in the details. There are two reasons for this, according to Michael. He ties each to a philosopher:

3. Hume: How will I know if I am headed towards the truth anyway? [*Treatise*, Book I, Part IV, Section 7 (p. 265 in Selby-Bigge)]
4. Hegel: Philosophical truth is not the kind of thing that can be presented in a Preface.
[*Phenomenology of Spirit*, ¶1]

Let us take these characterizations in order.

I find Michael's use of the passage from Hume's *Treatise* to be extremely puzzling. Michael brings it up in the context of the claim that the philosopher cannot describe her destination until she has reached it. This is the characterization of philosophy as a "mystery tour." But the mystery goes further still. As philosophers, Michael says, we may not even be able to be "confident we are really *advancing towards* that destination" (p. 2). The contrast, then, is between *describing* one's destination and maintaining confidence that we are *advancing towards* it.

The first thing that puzzles me is that Michael describes this second predicament – inability to maintain confidence that I am *advancing towards* my destination – as "worse" than the first – inability to *describe* the destination. On a natural way of thinking about it however, the second *follows from* the first, rather than being a *worse* or *heightened version* of it. After all, if I cannot *describe the place I am going to*, then how could I possibly be confident that the place I currently am (which I can describe) is *closer to or farther away from my destination* than the place I recently was (which I can also describe)? Suppose, for example, that I was at A, am now at B, and have C as my destination. The natural way to make a judgment about whether B is closer to or farther away from C than A is, is to measure the distance from A to C, measure the distance from B to C, and compare the distances to see which is shorter. But if I can't tell you what C is, how am I to make the required measurements in the first place? On this way of thinking about it, then, my inability to maintain confidence about my progress *follows from* my inability to describe my destination.

As it happens, I'm not particularly sympathetic to the idea that "distances" of this sort are properly thought of in terms of "measurements." Perhaps, if you could measure the "truth" of a philosophical theory by some metric – the number of correct propositions it asserts, for instance – then we could develop an account of how to measure the closeness of one theory to another. Perhaps when people talk about how close one possible world is to another, they have something like this in mind. But this seems to me to trivialize philosophy. Perhaps there are other ways of thinking about the relative closeness between two positions, and if there are then perhaps the claim that my inability to maintain confidence about my progress does not follow from my inability to describe the ultimate destination. Indeed, I suspect this is the case – think, for instance of my sense that I am too far away from a picture to see it well, and the related sense that moving in *this direction* would count as an improvement. I might have both these experiences without knowing precisely what the picture will look like when I see it well. But let's leave that to the side for now.

But there's a much more important reason I find the use of the Hume passage puzzling here. That's because it doesn't seem at all in line with the view that philosophy is a mystery tour. A mystery is something that *beckons* and *calls out*, something that *promises* the possibility of resolution or clarity or understanding. But the whole tenor of Hume's empiricist form of skepticism is that these kinds of promises are necessarily to be broken. We see this when we look further at the context for Hume's remark.

Hume's comment here is typical of his general skepticism about our capacity for knowledge. Indeed, his concern about the lack of a criterion for truth is a direct result of his empiricism. The Humean empiricist believes that ideas come from habit and experience, not from reasoning. "After the most accurate and exact of my reasonings," Hume goes on to say after the sentence Michael quotes,

I can give no reason why I shou'd assent to it; and feel nothing but a *strong* propensity to consider objects *strongly* in that view, under which they appear to me.

This sentence shows that Hume is not just lacking “confidence” that we are “really *advancing towards*” our destination, as Michael suggests. Instead, it is a much deeper expression of the skepticism that follows from Hume’s empiricism. It is his empiricism, after all, that leads Hume to believe that for the most part when I assent to something there are no *reasons* that have convinced me of its *truth*. Recall that for Hume, instead, it is because of the mere *liveliness* of certain ideas, their “forcefulness and vivacity,” that I come to assent to some things but not others. The process that leads me to assent to something is not *rational* therefore, on Hume’s account, but the result of experience and habit. As he says in the following sentence, these two “principles” [experience and habit] both “operate upon the imagination” to “make me form certain ideas in a more intense and lively manner, than others.” It is only this *liveliness* that leads me to assent. As he says, further down the same page:

Without this quality, by which the mind enlivens some ideas beyond others (which seemingly is so trivial, and so little found on reason) we cou’d never assent to any argument, nor carry our view beyond those few objects, which are present to our senses.

This fuller examination of Hume’s position suggests to me that it is misleading for Michael to quote the passage from Hume in this context. After all, the passage Michael quotes is clearly an expression of the skepticism *that arises from Hume’s empiricism*. But Michael is not interested in Hume’s *empiricism* at all. Indeed, it seems quite certain that he would be completely unconvinced by it.

Furthermore, Michael’s point is precisely not to plump for any kind of *skepticism* about truth or knowledge, at least not here. If philosophy has a characteristic problem, he seems to be saying, it is not that we cannot *know* whether its claims are true. It is, instead, that we cannot *state* the claims *before* we have gone through the process of coming to *philosophical understanding*. The structure of Michael’s position therefore – that the “mystery tour” quality of philosophy leaves us unable adequately to describe our destination “until we have reached it” – looks much more like a Meno paradox than any kind of Humean skepticism.

The point Michael wants to make (it seems to me) is that, at least on the face of it, it is impossible to search for something if I don’t know what it is. Since philosophy essentially involves one in *changing one’s understanding*, and since the new understanding will only reveal itself *once one has been changed to it*, one cannot see what it looks like before one has undergone the process of transformation.

One is reminded here immediately of Laurie Paul’s recent work on transformative experience, of course. But perhaps more relevant is Socrates’ idea in the *Meno* that the truth is precisely something that one cannot seek. Roughly sketched, the argument goes like this. First, notice that in order to learn the truth one must seek it. Now, let us ask about this seeker. Does he or she know the truth already? If so, then she is no seeker, since one cannot seek what one already has. So, the person must not already know the truth. But then, if she does not know the truth already, how can she know what she is looking for? In either case, Socrates claims – whether one knows the truth already or does not know it – nobody is such that they can seek the truth. Furthermore, since one must seek the truth in order to learn it, nobody can learn the truth either, on the Socratic account. This leads Socrates, among other places, to the famous position that learning something is just remembering what one already knew. The challenge that this kind of paradox presents does seem related to the kind of “mystery” that philosophy manifests, as Plato’s Socrates suggests.

Interestingly, Kierkegaard pushes on this Socratic argument in an interesting way in *Philosophical Fragments*. (See, for instance, §1 of PF, entitled in the Hong and Hong translation “Thought-Project” (pp. 9-22, IV 179-191).) This is interesting because Kierkegaard’s rejection of the Greek conception of philosophy is of a piece with his revolt against Hegel. In particular, Kierkegaard believes the premise of the Meno argument – that in order to learn the truth one must *seek* it – is faulty. Clearly, he is working out of the Christian phenomenology, where a central case is that of Saul on the road to Damascus. Saul is precisely not seeking the truth, but railing against it, when he comes to “see the light.” His conversion is so dramatic that he *becomes someone new* after God speaks to him there. That he is someone new is marked by the fact that his name changes from Saul to Paul. The truth, on this version of it, is so radically different from everything Saul understood before his conversion, that he is perhaps the purest form of what Michael describes philosophy as requiring. When he says that because the mysterious aim of philosophy is “to change the understanding of what is otherwise taken for granted,” we could imagine Saul the persecutor of the Christians, who takes it for granted that Christianity is against the truths of Judaism. When he concludes from this that philosophy’s problem is “how can we describe our destination adequately until we have reached it?”, we cannot but imagine Paul the Apostle, who could not possibly have described what he sees to be the truths of Christianity until he had been transformed into an understanding of them. Kierkegaard concludes from this, however, unlike Hegel the dialectician (and even more unlike Hume the atheist empiricist skeptic, though for different reasons) that Philosophy cannot *know* the truth. This is, strangely, in league with the corrected version of the quote from Kant’s first Critique that Michael discusses later: “I have therefore found it necessary *to deny knowledge* to make room for faith” [CPR Bxxxii]. Who’d have thought that Kant and Kierkegaard would be in league with one another? Well, the fact is they are not. But the relations among these four positions (Hume, Kant, Hegel, Kierkegaard), on the nature of philosophy and its relation to truth, seem to me well worth delving into further. Alas, I cannot do it here.

Let’s turn briefly, then, to the passage from Hegel. The real point of Hegel’s discouraging remark in the Preface to the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, according to Michael, is that philosophy involves one in an almost paradoxical task. On the one hand, for philosophy to make progress we must have a shared understanding of “how philosophical argument is to take place” (p. 3). On the other hand, the whole history of philosophy suggests that no such shared understanding is available.

I’m not sure that this is really the point of Hegel’s comment. He doesn’t seem to be saying that, as a matter of fact, we haven’t been able to agree about how to do philosophy. He seems to be saying that *philosophical conclusions* can’t be separated out from *the activity of pursuing them philosophically*. As he says, “*whatever* one might properly say about philosophy in a preface and in *whatever way* one might say it ... none of this can be accepted as the way in which to present philosophical truth.” The issue seems to be about the way *prefaces* are supposed to work, and their inadequacy to philosophy, rather than about some contingent fact regarding our ability or inability to develop a shared understanding with one another. The idea is that *prefaces* can only state the conclusions of a philosophical argument, but consideration of the conclusions alone is no way into philosophical truth.

Interestingly, I think this is a deeper way into the point that Michael is making. What he wants to defend is the idea that philosophy is done well at least partly through the consideration of its history. The relevant issue here is not that consideration of its history shows that we can’t agree about “how philosophical argument is to take place.” Rather, the relevant issue is that the proper consideration

of the history of philosophy forces one to bring into question one's own background understanding about what can be taken for granted. Insofar as philosophy's aim is precisely "to change the understanding of what is otherwise taken for granted" (p. 2), the consideration of its history is one of the best ways to achieve that aim.

Or at least, that's what I would have meant if I were quoting that passage.

1.2 Secularization (3-6)

Summary

Ultimately, "this is a book about secularization" (p. 4). Michael introduces the idea of secularization through consideration of Nietzsche's claim about the death of God. After the death of God, Nietzsche writes, "there may still be caves for thousands of years in which his shadow will be shown" [*Gay Science* §108]. Michael considers various readings of the secularization thesis.

1. In the English-speaking world, it is most common to think that "secularization is simply the retreat of traditional religious practice" (p. 4). There are various evaluations of this trend.
 - a. Progress: "Enlightenment" thinkers (like Pinker) think of secularization as progress. They see "the retreat of religion as part of a movement by which reason and science gradually clear away the cobwebs of superstition and advance human well-being" (p. 4).
 - b. Regress: Counter-Enlightenment thinkers (like the Straussian, Allan Bloom) see secularization as regress. For them, the rise of technological capacity comes at the cost of "the loss of what really matters: a stable sense of what really matters."
 - c. Mixed Views: In between, there are "countless narratives of mingled gain and loss" (p. 4). Michael mentions Schiller's *entgötterte Welt* [de-godded world], Weber's *Entzauberung* [disenchantment], and the "long withdrawing roar" of the tide in Matthew Arnold's "Dover Beach." These understand secularization as "the move from one social world to another" (p. 4).
2. In the German world, however, there is an opposite sense of secularization. It is the view that the concepts of modern political thought are all "secularized" versions of theological concepts. See Carl Schmitt in *Political Theology*. Secularization on this view is the process by means of which religion carries on, albeit transformed, instead of falling into retreat.
3. Nietzsche is neither of these. God is dead, but he lingers by means of his shadow.
 - a. What is the shadow of God?
 - i. "ideas and practices that, in important ways, resemble traditional religion" (p. 5).
 1. Among these ideas and practices, the book considers especially the belief in personal immortality.
 2. It is especially interested in the transformation of this idea into a conception of "human self-transcendence through historical community" (p. 5).
 - ii. Nietzsche believes we must "vanquish" the shadow of God. Why?
 1. Simple answer: "human beings should live by the standards of reason and truth" (p. 5).

2. Nietzsche's more "radical and troubling" answer: "'living according to reason" and believing only what can be given a solid foundation is itself a myth" (p. 5).
- iii. Nietzsche's project of vanquishing the shadow of God changes the consequences of "connecting a belief back to its religious origins or motivations" (p. 5)
 1. The idea might lose its authority once the connection to religion is uncovered. [Example: Perhaps he is thinking of the genealogical project in *Beyond Good and Evil*? The idea of "good" as the opposite of "evil" is supposed to seem silly once we realize that it found its origins in nothing more than *ressentiment*.
 2. But the idea might find a different ground. [Example: rights grounded in a notion of dignity not arising from God as our creator. See, for instance, Dworkin, *Religion without God*.]
- iv. Importantly, and in contrast with all the preceding accounts, Michael treats secularization from a perspective "internal to the ideas themselves" (p. 6).
 1. The main internal force is the Kantian and German Idealist commitment to the thought that God's goodness itself requires that his actions be "justified."
 2. It might be interesting to think of this notion of "justification" in the context of the line of interpretations of that notion that run from Augustine to Medieval Christianity to Luther.

Interesting Passages Cited

1. After Buddha was dead, his shadow was still shown for centuries in a cave – a tremendous, gruesome shadow. God is dead; but given the way of men, there may still be caves for thousands of years in which his shadow will be shown. – And we – we still have to vanquish his shadow. [Nietzsche (1882), *The Gay Science*, §108]
2. An idealist is incorrigible: thrown him out of his Heaven and he will make himself an ideal out of his Hell. [Nietzsche (1886), *Human, All Too Human*, Vol. II, §23]

Questions

Can we say more about the way that Nietzsche's notion of the shadow of God, and his project of vanquishing that shadow, complicates the consequences of tracing post-religious ideas to a religious source? It looks like there are two options:

1. Revealing the religious source of an idea weakens the idea.
2. Revealing the religious source of an idea inspires one to find a different source for the idea.

What exactly is the complication here? Is it that there is now a meta-problem, about which of these options is the correct one? How do these options interact with one another? Does the genealogy of the idea invalidate the *desire* to find a different source? Maybe the *desire* is motivated by the original religious impulse, and so it is itself invalidated? What exactly is the issue here?

Also, can we say more about the "internal perspective" from which Michael wants to treat the idea of secularization? This will turn out to be very important in the book – indeed, it may be the book's primary contribution. It is presented in a very terse way at this point.

Comments

Let's think just a little bit more about the "internal justification" for secularization that Michael presents on p. 6. The idea seems to be that monotheistic religions generate a problem that somehow, perhaps inevitably, leads to their own decline. What is the problem? It comes in stages:

1. First, consider a monotheistic religion. Michael wants us to believe that we could consider any of Judaism, Christianity, or Islam, since they all have the relevant features in virtue of their monotheism. Is this right?
2. Notice that the religion presents the world to believers as the product of an omnipotent, omniscient, omnibenevolent deity.
3. There are two possible ways to live in the world with the belief in this aspect of its appearance.
 - a. Have blind faith that the world is God's creation – in other words, the creation of a benevolent deity – regardless of the natural or moral evils that one sees in it. On this option, we may assume that the goodness of God's creation is not open to human comprehension.
 - b. Find a way to justify the world and one's place in it.
4. If we are inclined to the second – to the idea that reason and faith must somehow be combined – then this "causes monotheism enormous difficulties" (p. 6).

We are not told here what the difficulties are. They will have something to do with the Lisbon earthquake of 1755. Kant's response to this provocation offers a way of thinking about what kind of justification is needed and offers a version of it – all in the name of "mak[ing] room for faith" [CPR Bxxx]. But we shall see that it also hastens the movement of secularization.

1.3 Faith and Reason (6-7)

Summary

Religion is not beyond the bounds of pure reason, for Kant. The Lisbon earthquake of 1755 "led to a search for new ways to defend the claim that the world is the product of a benevolent creator" (p. 7). Kant's response was to say that the "goodness of the world lies in human freedom – freedom that makes human beings justifiably open to reward and (more especially) deserving of punishment" (p. 7). If our reward and punishment are to be justified, divine justice must be intelligible to human beings. What is intelligible to human beings, according to Kant, is morality. So, we must be rewarded or punished for our moral or immoral behavior. To tie God's divine goodness so closely to human morality, however, threatens to make God superfluous. In this way, Kant's rationalistic religion is "self-undermining" (p. 7).

Interesting Passages Cited

1. Kant, who destroyed all the systems of metaphysics and dug a grave for theology, was also a believer who, as he put it, "attacked the claims of reason in order to make room for those of faith." It seems to me that he was right. [Roger Scruton, "Memo to Hawking: There is Still Room for God," WSJ Sept. 24, 2010]
2. I have found it necessary *to deny knowledge* to make room for faith. [Kant, CPR Bxxx]

Questions

Comments

I am no defender of Scruton. But I don't really understand what point Michael is making when he criticizes Scruton for saying that Kant "attacked the claims of reason" instead of that he "found it necessary to deny knowledge." It is true that Scruton mangles the quotation, but Michael says there is "an extremely significant change of meaning" in Scruton's new way of thinking about it. The significance, according to Michael, is that religion is precisely *not beyond* reason for Kant but *requires* it. This is all to the good, except that there is an important sense in which Kant is, in this very passage, attacking "speculative reason." As he says, in the sentence two before the one under consideration:

[E]ven the *assumption* – as made on behalf of the necessary practical employment of my reason – of *God, freedom, and immortality* is not permissible unless at the same time speculative reason be deprived of its pretension to transcendental insight. [CPR, Bxxix – Bxxx]

The point here is that the kind of *speculative* reason that commits [ultimately in a dogmatic way, Kant will claim] to the transcendental existence of God gets in the way of the assumption we must make [in the "*practical* employment of my reason"] of God. Kant does, in other words, attack the claims of *speculative* reason – indeed, the whole project of the first Critique is to give a sense for the *limits* of this kind of reason. And furthermore, he attacks it precisely in order to make room for faith. It is true that the faith he wants to make room for is identical with "rational belief." Indeed, the translators use hendiadys to translate the single word *Vernunftglaubens* as the disjunctive phrase "rational belief or faith." [See *Religion within the Bounds of Reason Alone*, 8:140, p. 10 in the Cambridge Revised Edition of Wood, et. al.] So the notion of faith itself, understood as the kind of faith for which Kant is making room, undergoes a transformation. But there is still *a form of reason* – namely speculative reason, with its dogmatic claim to knowledge, that is being rejected in order to make room for it.

It is perhaps petty, but worth pointing out to make the discussion of the text easier, that Michael himself mis-cites the passage that he and Scruton are arguing about. Michael says that it appears at CPR Bxxxix (in footnote 17), when in fact it appears the page before at CPR Bxxx.

On another topic, it is interesting to note that, for some amazing reason, there was also a large earthquake in 1755 in the Boston area. (Was it the same *day* as the Lisbon earthquake? Check.) This earthquake also generated a lot of commentary from Boston and Cambridge area intellectuals. I have put into the files folder a document that contains a series of excerpts from discussions of the event by four prominent Puritans: Rev. Cotton Mather, Rev. James Allin, Rev. Thomas Prince, and Professor John Winthrop (Professor Mathematics and Philosophy at Harvard College). Would it be interesting to think about the relation between the responses to natural disaster that were generated in Cambridge as opposed to Königsberg? Are they the same? Different? What background presuppositions are motivating these responses?

1.4 Posterity (7-8)

Summary

One of the traditional ways to justify God's punishment of the wicked and reward for the good was through the mechanism of personal immortality. The wicked are punished in the afterlife, and the good are rewarded there. Kant believed in personal immortality, but that belief was starting to be harder for some. More interesting, and influential according to Michael, was Kant's idea that one can develop a "new conception of human self-transcendence, centred on individuals' membership in historical communities" (p. 7). Others, like Diderot and Coleridge, came to believe something like this as well. The idea that we live on in posterity has a history going back at least to the Greeks Romans, who believed that the heroic life is the one worth singing about. But Kant's version, influenced by the universalism of Christianity, was open to all. We live on under the eye of posterity by being "united as part of mankind as a whole" (p. 8). Even the simplest among us become part of a "never-ending human chain."

Interesting Passages Cited

1. Oh holy and sacred Posterity! Support of the unhappy who are oppressed, you who are just and who is not corrupted, who avenges the virtuous, unmask the hypocrite, and tames the tyrant; sure and consoling idea, never abandon me! Posterity for the philosopher is the other world of the religious man. [Diderot, letter to Falconet, February 15, 1766]
2. What comfort in the silent eye upraised to God! "Thou knowest." O! what a thought! Never to be friendless, never to be unintelligible! The omnipresence has generally been represented as a spy, a sort of Bentham's Panopticon. O to feel what the pain is to be utterly unintelligible and then – "O God, thou understands!" [Coleridge, unpublished notebooks]

Questions

I don't get why Diderot thinks that posterity will "avenge the virtuous," "unmask the hypocrite," and "tame the tyrant." Does this view depend upon some commitment to the idea that history progresses, that in the future we will better be able to recognize the genuinely virtuous and the genuinely wicked? [Look at it in context?]

Coleridge's idea is at the core of much medieval mysticism. A traditional trope of mystical visions (consider Hildegard of Bingen, for example) is the comfort, and even ecstasy, that one finds in the "god of many eyes." How is Coleridge's view different from this?

Comments

This is clearly the section that introduces the subtitle of the book: "from heaven to history." I would like to understand better what the consolation might be that recognition in the eyes of history could offer. Coleridge's idea, that it is the promise of finally being *understood*, seems interesting. Could we think, here, of the Kierkegaardian – or even Hegelian – hope that at some later point in history we will have the vocabulary to make intelligible our sense of what must be done? Think of the possibility that Kierkegaard broke off the engagement with Regina because he was gay, even though he didn't have a word for that and even if he had it wouldn't have justified the action. From our perspective, later in history, we could describe that possibility in a way that might work to justify the action, so perhaps Michael is thinking that Coleridge's idea is that this future perspective is what Kierkegaard could hope for. But are there other ways to think about the kind of self-transcendence that posterity might offer? Think, for instance, of the discussion in Sam Scheffler's 2012 Tanner Lectures, recently published as *Death and the Afterlife*. Scheffler discusses the potentially devastating

effect it would have on our projects and our self-conception if we knew that, thirty years after our generation died, the earth would be destroyed by a collision with a massive asteroid. If, somehow, our current conception of ourselves depends upon the assumption that there will be a posterity, then perhaps in some sense this notion of posterity could stand as a form of our self-transcendence. What exactly the connection could be here – how to describe the relation between the German Idealist notion of self-transcendence in posterity and the Schefflerian idea that the possibility of a future is required for life in the here and now – is not clear to me. But perhaps this is an issue worth pursuing.

1.5 The Church Invisible (9-10)

Summary

The idea of the Church Invisible has clear theological origins and can be interpreted in several ways. Its interpretation is related to the interpretation of the phrase *corpus mysticum*, which refers to the “mystical body of Christ.” The mystical body of Christ is something like the Church, considered as the people who genuinely belong to it (because they are saved?).

1. Traditional Christianity: A division between the living and the dead.
 - a. Visible Church: those who belong to the Church *in this world*.
 - i. For Augustine, to belong to the Church in this world is to be part of the community of believers who have become its members *by receiving its sacraments*. (p. 9)
 - b. Church Invisible: those who *have achieved salvation* and “enjoy the presence of God in the next [world]” (p. 9).
2. Protestant Theology (esp. Calvin)
 - a. Church Visible: Those who are outwardly Christians “by the standards of practices and conventions”
 - b. Church Invisible: “the true Christians sanctified by divine grace” (p. 9).
 - c. Notice that both Churches, in the Calvinist use of the terms, include people currently living. In particular, the Church Invisible includes the subset of the Visible Church community who, in addition to being outwardly Christian, *have also (already) been saved by God’s grace*. On the Calvinist view, God’s decision about your salvation was made already before you were born, although it is hidden from you. Who belongs to the Calvinist Church Invisible, therefore, cannot be known (that’s why it’s *invisible*). But we do know (presumably?) that some among us belong to it.
3. Kant, Hegel, and Schelling
 - a. Church Visible: the human community at large? Rational animals? Humans insofar as they are rational?
 - b. Church Invisible: the ideal form of moral community, considered as the “world composed of human beings who exceptionlessly follow the moral law.” Kant also calls this the “kingdom of ends” (p. 10). Although this ideal moral community does not now exist, we can think of ourselves aiming to hold it as the standard with respect to which we may be judged.

Interesting Passages Cited

1. Let reason and freedom be our watchword and our rallying point the Church invisible. [Hegel, letter to Schelling, end of January 1795]

2. Leibniz also calls the kingdom of ends moral principles of the kingdom of grace. [Kant, Mongrovious transcription of the 1785 Lectures on Ethics, AK 29:610]
3. The kingdom of grace is “a *corpus mysticum* of the rational beings in it, so far as the free will of each being is, under moral laws, in complete systematic unity with itself and with the freedom of every other.” [CPR A808/B836]

Questions

What is the history of the relation, for Kant, between the kingdom of grace and the kingdom of ends? Is there a slow transition?

Comments

1.6 Freedom (10-12)

Summary

One aspires to the Church Invisible through the pursuit of “reason and freedom,” for Hegel and Schelling. There is here, however, a “distinctive conception of freedom,” that starts with Kant and is adapted by his successors, Fichte, Schelling, and Hegel. At the center of it is the idea of what Rousseau called “a law that one has prescribed to oneself” (p. 11). This seems to involve one in a paradox – called the *paradox of autonomy*. After all, how can one follow a law that one prescribes for oneself? Surely, because one has prescribed it, one can also reconfigure it or reject it. What authority could a self-prescribed law have? How could it, in other words, *be a law*? The Idealists get out of this paradox by developing a conception of freedom that involves a kind of “internal necessity.” The section derives the contrast between *internal* and *external* necessity from Spinoza, whose idea the Idealists were drawing on. For Spinoza, God is free precisely in the sense that everything he does follows of necessity from the being that he is. The Idealists apply this notion of freedom to us.

Interesting Passages Cited

1. The impulse of appetite alone is slavery, and obedience to a law that one has prescribed to oneself is freedom. [Rousseau, *The Social Contract* (1762)]
2. ... nature is not free but is only necessary and contingent. For necessity is the inseparability of different terms which yet appear as indifferent towards each other; but because this abstract state of externality also receives its due, there is contingency in nature – external necessity, not the internal necessity of the notion [*Begriff*]. [Hegel, *Encyclopedia of the Philosophical Sciences II* (1830)]
3. I say that that thing is free which exists and acts solely from the necessity of its own nature; but that that thing is under compulsion which is determined by something else to exist, and to act in a definite and determined manner. For example, God, although He exists necessarily, nevertheless exists freely, since He exists solely from the necessity of His own nature. So also God freely understands Himself and absolutely all things since it follows solely from the necessity of His own nature that He should understand everything. You see, therefore, that I do not place freedom in free decision, but in free necessity. [Spinoza, Letter to Schuller, October 1674]

Questions

Can you spell out the relation among the various notions of freedom, contingency, and necessity for Spinoza and the Idealists?

Comments

Freedom is clearly a central concept, perhaps even *the* central concept, for Kant and the German Idealists. On Michael's reading, the need to give a philosophical account of freedom is motivated (and therefore constrained) by the need to justify God's reward and punishment. On the one hand, we must *freely* perform the actions we do to be rewarded or punished for them. On the other hand, the reward or punishment we receive must be *intelligible* to us for God to be the good being he is. The move is to develop a new conception of freedom according to which free action is action that is *necessary* for a rational being like me. This notion of necessity at play here is not properly analyzed in terms of possible worlds. That's to say, its opposite is not the kind of contingency that says there are some possible worlds in which I might not have acted in the way my rationality demands. Rather, there is a notion of *internal* necessity that might be spelled out as follows: to be the being I am, I *must* act in a way that accords with the demands of rationality. This is tricky, and there are all sorts of pitfalls. We'll have to look out for them as Michael develops this notion of freedom, especially in chapters 3-5. For the time being, however, we can highlight the notions of freedom, necessity, contingency, rationality, and moral law as notions that come together in some kind of new way for the German Idealists.

1.7 Hegel and Religion (12-15)

Summary

What was the relation between Hegel's philosophy and traditional Christianity? Was Hegel an orthodox believer? On Michael's view, "Hegel is looking for the restoration of what has been lost with the decline of religious consciousness" (p. 12). Hegel's official view seems to have been that Hegelianism and Christianity are in agreement. The difference is between a religious *representation* [*Vorstellung*] of the truth and a philosophical *thinking* [*Denken*] of it. But what is this relation? Michael argues that Hegel was not an orthodox Protestant. He seems to be moving away from the world of divine transcendence and towards a kind of immanent and pantheistic account. God is in the world (p. 14). Hegel also tacitly abandons "the traditional religious doctrine of the Last Judgment" (p. 15).

Interesting Passages Cited

1. The public are concerned in philosophy with religion – lost religion; not science – that only comes afterwards. Human beings want to experience what their situation is, they want satisfaction for themselves; that is the interest of humanity in this time. [Hegel, Jena Notebooks (1803-1806)]
2. Nothing can be further removed from philosophy than to overturn religion or to maintain that the content of religion cannot be truth in itself. Rather, religion *is* the true content, although in the form of *Vorstellung* [representation]. Philosophy is not the first to give substantial truth; nor did mankind have to wait for philosophy in order to get consciousness of the truth. [Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion I* (1821-1831)]
3. God is this movement in itself, and, only through that, living God. But this persistence of finitude must not be held fixed, but sublated [*aufgehoben*]: God is the movement to the finite and thus, as its sublation [*Aufhebung*], to himself. In the I, as that which sublates itself as finite, God returns to himself and only exists as God in this return. Without the world, God is not God. [Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion I* (1821-1831)]

Questions

Comments

There are several other interesting passages cited in this section as well. I haven't had the time to fill them in.

1.8 Philosophies as Forms of Life (15-20)

Summary

Interesting Passages Cited

Questions

Comments

1.9 The Threat of Nihilism (20)

Summary

Interesting Passages Cited

Questions

Comments

1.10 With and against Hegel (20-21)

Summary

Interesting Passages Cited

Questions

Comments

1.11 A Summary and a Few Remarks (22-26)

Summary

Interesting Passages Cited

Questions

Comments

1.12 Texts and Translations (26-27)

Summary

Interesting Passages Cited

Questions

Comments

Student Comments

Ian: Lisbon earthquake compared with the Holocaust.

Lukas: Also struck by the passage about Adorno. How does it influence Rosen's account of German Idealism to be writing *after* Auschwitz and Adorno?

Tarek: When Kant tries to argue that there must be an afterlife, what is the form of his argument?

Many other student comments, and lots of conversation, that I didn't take notes on. Refer to the recording.