

Notes on Rosen Chapter 2  
West Redding, CT  
Wednesday September 20, 2023  
6:00 a.m.

Here's an outline of the sections of chapter 2. The chapter is called "An Idealist Theory of History."

1. An Idealist Theory of History (28-66)
  - 1.1. Marx and the Acceptance Problem (28-32)
  - 1.2. Int-in-Leg-Out or Leg-In-Leg-Out (32-38)
  - 1.3. Hegel's Idealism (38-43)
  - 1.4. Socratism and the Religious Tradition (43-47)
  - 1.5. Lost Religion (47-51)
  - 1.6. The Problem of Evil (51-58)
  - 1.7. The Euthyphro Dilemma (58-63)
  - 1.8. Ideological History (63-66)

### Overview

Chapter 2 of Rosen's book should be considered a second, somewhat more detailed, meta-narrative, describing the relation between philosophy and history. If the first chapter told us lots about why philosophy needs history to be the best kind of philosophy, chapter two moves on to two related issues. First, we get a general, Hegelian Idealistic, story about what the proper engagement with history is for philosophy. The approach is organized by the importance of what Michael calls The Acceptance Problem: how do ideas that go *against* the interests of some, or perhaps even many, in society, nevertheless come to be *accepted* (p. 32). Michael canvases an *instrumentalist* answer to this question, which he attributes to Marx, a *discursive transcendentalist* answer that he finds in Quentin Skinner and Michel Foucault, and finally an *idealist* answer that he attributes to Hegel. After presenting his own version of the Hegelian Idealist answer to the Acceptance Problem, Rosen then develops two specific ideas in Kantian and German Idealist thought that do the work of explaining the idealist answer to the Acceptance Problem. These are the problem of theodicy and the Euthyphro problem. Each has a broad and a narrow form. In discussing the broad form of these two problems, Michael develops a new interpretation of Kant's project, which pits itself against Beiser's reading of Kantian *autonomy* and Rawls's reading of Kantian *moral constructivism*.

Here's some further detail on each of the sections.

### 1.1 Marx and the Acceptance Problem (28-32)

#### Summary

Marx believed that philosophy was nothing more than religious ideology developed in thought. He thought the failure of philosophical system-builders showed that it could be nothing more. As a result, he said, anyone interested in history should not look at "ideas" directly, but should look at material, real life processes, which are the expression of the prevailing ideology. This leads him to develop the view that the ideas that govern an epoch in history are "the product of interests" (30). Michael calls this an "instrumentalist" view of history. It is neither politically Left nor Right on its own but can be adopted by either progressives or conservatives. But Michael believes there are "very fundamental difficulties with instrumentalism" (30). As far as I can tell, he mentions two:

1. Emptiness: “Most obviously, absent an independent definition of “interest”, the approach threatens to fall into emptiness” (30).
  - a. Sidgwick: depends on the “tautological proposition” that “what I desire and aim at is aimed at by me” (30).
  - b. Sen: Neo-classical economics presents itself as depending upon a notion of “utility” that is “agnostic about people’s desires and values” (31). But it assumes, against this self-presentation, that political agents are profit maximizers.
2. The Acceptance Problem: How do ideas that go against the interests of some, or even many, come to be accepted?
  - a. Marxism answers this question by proposing that “the ideas of the ruling class are ... the ruling ideas” (32).
    - i. Michael is unsatisfied with this answer. The reason is that it presupposes that the dominated lack agency.

### Interesting Passages Cited

1. Marx from *The German Ideology* (29)
2. Sen from “Rational Fools” (30-31)
3. Marx from *The German Ideology* (32)

### Questions

1. What exactly is “instrumentalism”? What are good examples of it? Is a good example something like the Chick-Fil-A case that he mentions, or the Hobby Lobby case?
2. What exactly is the Acceptance Problem? Is it related to the idea that its puzzling that people should vote against their own self-interest? That poor people, for instance, should vote for people who propose a flat tax, and even *because* they propose a flat tax, even though this kind of tax is worse for them? Is the question How do we explain that such an idea gains “acceptance” in society?
3. What are the arguments against instrumentalism?

### Comments

## 1.2 Interests-in-Legitimation-Out or Legitimation-In-Legitimation-Out (32-38)

### Summary

Another response to the Acceptance problem is what Michael calls “discursive transcendentalism.” He attributes it to Quentin Skinner and Michel Foucault. Discursive Transcendentalism is the view that the object of interest for an intellectual historian is “the background structure within which particular utterances, speech-acts and texts are given their meanings” (34). It is, in fact, aimed at the whole “social imaginary” (34-5). Michael is also unsatisfied with this position. The argument seems to be that it is “just a crude social functionalism” (37). In fact, like Marxism, DT is a view that generates legitimation in a society out of the *interests* of some in it. The question, for Michael, is how the ideas that reflect the interests of the generators become *persuasive* to those who accept them. This leads Michael to propose an alternative view, which generates legitimation from legitimation.

### Interesting Passages Cited

1. Skinner on the entrepreneurs of early modern Europe (33).

2. Skinner on “the conventions that govern the possible intentions available to authors and speakers” (perhaps the core of DT?) (34).
3. Foucault on DT (35-6). This is from two lectures in *Power/Knowledge*. (i.e., relatively early Foucault?).

### Questions

1. I’m not sure I understand either what Discursive Transcendentalism is, or what Michael’s argument against it is!

### Comments

## 1.3 Hegel’s Idealism (38-43)

### Summary

Develops and defends Hegel’s form of historical idealism. In contrast with Marx’s historical materialism, it develops a different account of both the “diachronic” theory of historical change and the “synchronic” theory of social cohesion at a time (38). To do this, Michael has to disagree with Paul Redding’s account of Hegel’s notion of *Geist* in the SEP. For Redding, *Geist* is just a set of culturally distinctive patterns of social interaction (38). But Michael wants to insist that for Hegel, *Geist* is “the Absolute itself” (39). This allows Michael to offer Hegel a new and (to Michael) more satisfying answer to the Acceptance Problem (41). But Hegel’s answer depends upon his weird metaphysics (42). Michael’s goal is to offer “Hegelianism without Hegel” (42).

### Interesting Passages Cited

Too many!

### Questions

1. What is Michael’s account of Hegel’s answer to the Acceptance Problem?
  - a. One feature of this answer must be that it can “recognize that different groups have different and conflicting interests” (43). How does this manifest itself in Michael’s project?

### Comments

## 1.4 Socratism and the Religious Tradition (43-47)

### Summary

Nietzsche, in *The Birth of Tragedy*, suggests that tragedy is born from the conflict between the Dionysian and Apollonian impulses in a culture. But tragedy, in Nietzsche’s account, is replaced by a form of Socratism that does not have this conflict. Socratism says that the world must be *knowable*. Nietzsche believes that Socratism will come to an end and make way for art. Michael wants a Nietzschean account that adds something: that the world will become knowable *as good*.

### Interesting Passages Cited

### Questions

### Comments

## 1.5 Lost Religion

(47-51)

### Summary

Presents the problem of theodicy and the Euthyphro problem as basic motivations for Kant. Contrasts his view of Kant with Beiser's on two accounts. First, according to Beiser, Kant's notion of autonomy is motivated primarily by *political* rather than *metaphysical* issues. Second, according to Beiser, Kant's new ethics rejects the natural law tradition. For Michael, by contrast, the motivation for autonomy is primarily metaphysical, and Kant does not make "a profound break" with the natural law tradition.

### Interesting Passages Cited

### Questions

### Comments

## 1.6 The Problem of Evil

(51-58)

### Summary

### Interesting Passages Cited

### Questions

### Comments

## 1.7 The Euthyphro Dilemma

(58-63)

### Summary

### Interesting Passages Cited

### Questions

### Comments

## 1.8 Ideological History

(63-66)

### Summary

### Interesting Passages Cited

### Questions

### Comments