

Notes on Rosen Chapter 3
Dunster House Faculty Dean Residence
2nd Floor Office
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6:30 a.m.

To begin with, here's an outline of the sections in chapter 3.

1. Kant's Anti-Determinism (67-84)
 - 1.1. Desert and Punishment (67-69)
 - 1.2. Fatalism (70-73)
 - 1.3. Practical and Theoretical Freedom (73-75)
 - 1.4. Transcendental Idealism (76-82)
 - 1.5. Initiating a Series of Appearances (82-84)

Overview

We saw in Chapter 2 that Kant believes, on Michael's interpretation, that "an intelligibly just God must judge and punish human beings in ways that they can rationally accept as justified" (67). A prerequisite for this is that human beings have the kind of agency that makes it possible for them to be *responsible* for their actions. This chapter explains Kant's view about what makes this kind of agency possible. A fundamental aspect of this explanation requires, according to Michael's reading of Kant, an account of the possibility of our *noumenal*, not just our *practical*, freedom. (There seem to be several, interchangeable names for our *noumenal* freedom. These include *transcendental*, *metaphysical*, and *theoretical* freedom. Are these distinct?) The idea that Kant is devoted to making sense of our *noumenal* freedom – the metaphysical freedom of the self when it is considered as a thing-in-itself – is rejected by mainstream of Kant interpreters and appropriators. Figures as diverse as Korsgaard, Wood, Strawson, and Scruton, for instance, deny it. Kant does say things, in the *Groundwork* especially, that suggest the mainstream view. He says things elsewhere, however, that suggest he thinks an account of *noumenal* freedom is not only necessary but possible. Michael offers a re-interpretation of the central passages from the *Groundwork*, so that they become consistent with the more general demand for an account of *noumenal* freedom. Kant's goal, on Michael's view, is to show that Transcendental Idealism alone – and especially the part of it that interprets space and time as appearances rather than "determinations belonging to the existence of things in themselves" (quoted on 71) – TI alone, understood this way, can ground a "theoretical *defense* of freedom" (75). Michael's account of Kant's "anti-deterministic" theory of freedom depends on several crucial distinctions that we shall have to grapple with. The first is the distinction between *practical* and *transcendental* freedom (68ff, 73ff, et. al.); the second is that between a *defense* and an *explanation* of transcendental freedom (75ff); and the third is that between an action's *following upon* and its *arising out of* what comes before it (83ff).

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

3.1 Desert and Punishment (67-69)

Summary

We have seen that Michael traces the basic motivation for Kant's project to his need to *justify* God's reward of the virtuous and His punishment of the wicked. God's retributivism in particular – his

punishment of the wicked – requires that as human beings we are capable of being responsible for our actions. After all, God would not be justified in punishing us for doing wicked things if we hadn't been free to perform those actions in the first place. On Michael's view, this requires Kant to make sense of the possibility that we *really are free* – that we can at least *make sense of the possibility*, in other words, that we have what he calls, variously, *noumenal* or *transcendental* or *metaphysical* or *theoretical* freedom. It would not be enough, on this view, to show merely that “we must see ourselves as practically free” (69). It is not enough, in other words, to show that “we necessarily act under the idea of freedom” (69). The reason, as we shall see in the next section, is that our consciousness of ourselves as free might turn out to be “a mere delusion” (71). Therefore, “a theoretical account of freedom is both necessary for Kant and, in his view, possible” (69). This interpretive claim, if correct, goes against the mainstream, secular humanist interpretations of Kant that we find in figures as diverse as Korsgaard, Wood, Strawson, and Scruton.

Interesting Passages Cited

1. Kant's theory of the freedom of the will involves neither extravagant ontological claims nor the unyielding theory of responsibility which seems to follow from those claims. (68) [Korsgaard, “Morality as Freedom,” p. 183]
2. We should believe we are practically free – but we are not justified in holding any beliefs about the noumenal world in connection with this. ... no positive doctrine about noumenal freedom has any place in Kantian ethics ... [it should be] quarantined from Kantian ethics just as strictly as if it carried the plague. (68) [Wood, *Kantian Ethics*, p. 138]
3. Strawson on “reactive attitudes” (68) [Strawson, “Freedom and Resentment]
4. ... every being that cannot act otherwise than *under the idea of freedom* is just because of that really free in a practical respect, that is, all laws that are inseparably bound up with freedom hold for him just as if his will had validly been pronounced free also in itself and in theoretical philosophy. (69) [Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, Ak. 4:448]
5. ... reason would overstep all its bounds if it took upon itself to *explain how* pure reason can be practical, which would be exactly the same task as to explain *how freedom is possible*. (69) [Kant, *Groundwork*, Ak. 4:458-59]
6. [Kant's solution to the problem of freedom] referring as it does to a transcendental perspective, is such that we can only comprehend its incomprehensibility. (69) [Scruton, *Kant*, pp. 75-76]

Questions

1. Are there any interesting distinctions between noumenal, metaphysical, transcendental, and theoretical freedom?
2. I find the last paragraph of the section confusing. It insists, in apparent contrast with Wood, that Kant's rationalism is a “religious rationalism” or a “rationalistic religion.” But in the footnote, he admits that Wood would not deny this. So, what is his complaint with Wood? I think it must be that, whereas Wood denies that we whether we *deserve* reward or punishment is both beyond our comprehension and also not a thing that Kant is motivated to show. He will deny the second because he doesn't see the theodical origin of Kant's project. And without this focus, he will not be sufficiently motivated to look for an answer to how what we deserve is possible. But is that right?

Comments

It would be really interesting to read this section in relation to a more detailed assessment of Korsgaard's paper "Morality as Freedom." The question I would have in mind is what Chris's arguments are for the claim that the necessity of our *seeing ourselves as* practically free is "sufficient for us to *be* free in any sense that matters" (p. 69). Michael does not attack this claim *per se*. He only attacks the idea that it is a claim that Kant would not be sympathetic with. If he's right, it goes to the heart of Chris's *reading of Kant*, but not to the heart of *her project in ethics insofar as it is inspired by that reading of Kant*. How much of Kant's theodical motivation do we have to accept to find the project that Michael spells out on his behalf an interesting one?

3.2 Fatalism

(70-73)

Summary

There are five places in Kant's work where he offers, according to Michael, substantive discussions of the metaphysical issues surrounding freedom. These are:

1. *Critique of Pure Reason*, Third Antinomy (1781, 1787)
2. *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, Section III (1785)
3. *Critique of Practical Reason*, "Critical Elucidation of the Analytic of Pure Practical Reason" (1787)
4. *Lectures on Ethics* (Vigilantius transcript) (1793)
5. *Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone*, Part I (1793, 1794)

In addition, the *Metaphysics of Morals*, although it doesn't have a substantive discussion of the metaphysics of freedom, does develop a distinction between *Willkür* (the power of choice) and *Wille* (the rational will), as well as a discussion of what it means for the will to be "self-determining," that is relevant for all such discussions.

Of these texts only one – found in the passages from Part III of the *Groundwork* – suggests the mainstream view that "human beings' belief in their own freedom is ... self-validating" (71). The rest suggest that, far from being the compatibilist he is often held to be, Kant believes the transcendental idealistic denial of space and time as things-in-themselves is the key to a defense of the possibility of metaphysical freedom. The fact that Kant is developing these views in the context of the "Pantheism Debate" lends further support to the idea that he was aiming to defend the possibility of metaphysical freedom. The *Pantheismusstreit* was the debate over whether Lessing was Spinozist. Spinozism in the relevant sense involves a kind of fatalism or determinism about human agency. The view was commonly held to ground atheism or pantheism, and was understood to be in conflict with religious orthodoxy. Kant, on Michael's view, is developing his conception of freedom as a response to this kind of Spinozism.

Three facts are taken to be established:

1. Kant is exercised by fatalism.
2. Freedom must be transcendental, not just "psychological" or "comparative."
3. The mainstream view (that our freedom consists entirely in its being necessary that we think of ourselves as free) cannot deal with the "threat posed by natural necessity" [i.e., fatalism?].

In response to these facts, we must re-interpret the passages from the *Groundwork* that seem to establish the mainstream view.

Interesting Passages Cited

1. A human being would be a marionet or an automaton, like Vaucanson's, built and wound up by the supreme artist; self-consciousness would indeed make him a thinking automaton, but the consciousness of his own spontaneity, if taken for freedom, would be mere delusion inasmuch as it deserves to be called freedom only comparatively, because the proximate determining causes of its motion and along series of their determining causes are indeed internal but the last and highest is found entirely in an alien hand. Therefore I do not see how those who insist on regarding time and space as determinations belonging to the existence of things in themselves would avoid fatalism of actions. (71) [Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, Ak. 5:101]
2. [According to the advocates of "psychological freedom"] The actions of a human being, although they are necessary by their determining grounds which preceded them in time, are yet called free because the actions are caused from within, by representations produced by our own powers, whereby desires are evoked on occasion of circumstances and hence actions are produced at our own discretion. (71) [Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, Ak. 5:96]
3. The view offered in [2] is a "wretched subterfuge" by whose means some philosophers "think they have solved, with a little quibbling about words, that difficult problem on the solution of which millennia have worked in vain. (71) [Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, Ak. 5:96]
4. [Those who adhere to a conception of psychological freedom] therefore leave no *transcendental freedom*, which must be thought as independence from everything empirical and so from nature generally, whether it is regarded as an object of inner sense in time only or also of outer sense in both space and time. [Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, Ak. 5:96-97]
5. If the freedom of our will were] psychological and comparative but not also transcendental, i.e. absolute ... [then] is would at bottom be nothing better than the freedom of a turnspit, which when it is once wound up, also accomplishes its movements of itself. Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, Ak. 5:97]

Questions

1. Can we learn more about what Kant's relation to the *Pantheismusstreit* was? Look at Beiser or Pinkard's accounts?
2. Can we read the relevant passages from the second *Critique* in context? Michael is quoting extensively from Ak. 5:96-101.
3. What is the form of compatibilism that Michael has Kant resisting? Isn't Kant usually held to be a compatibilist? (See, for instance, Wood: Kant endorses "not only the compatibility of freedom and determinism, but also the compatibility of compatibilism and incompatibilism" (Wood 1984, "Kant's Compatibilism," p. 74). Is Michael rejecting the view that Wood holds, or some other?

Comments

3.3 Practical and Theoretical Freedom (73-75) Summary

Michael wants to suggest that Kant aims to resolve the apparent conflict between natural necessity and freedom. The passages from the *Groundwork* suggest that he does not aim to do this. Michael, therefore, has to read those passages as saying something other than that our freedom really does consist entirely in the necessity of our understanding ourselves to be free. His main move is to distinguish between a *defense* of the possibility of resolving the apparent conflict between natural necessity and freedom, and an *explanation* of how that resolution is to occur. What Kant is resisting, according to Michael, is the possibility of an *explanation* of how freedom can be reconciled with natural necessity. That really is beyond the limits of reason, and therefore beyond the limits of philosophy. But *explanation* is a rather narrow project, confined primarily to science. *Defense* is at least one proper aim of philosophy, and “Kant believes that at theoretical *defence* of freedom is both necessary ... and possible, although such a defense is not undertaken in [the *Groundwork*]” (75).

Interesting Passages Cited

1. A being that cannot act other than under the idea of freedom is just because of that really free ... *in a practical respect*, that is, all laws that are inseparably bound up with freedom hold for him just as if his will had validly been pronounced free also in itself and in theoretical philosophy. (73) [Kant, *Groundwork* Ak. 4:448]
2. I follow this route – that of assuming freedom sufficiently for our purpose only as laid down by rational beings merely *in idea* as a ground for their actions – so that I need not be bound to prove freedom in its theoretical respect as well. For even if the latter is left unsettled, still the same laws hold for a being that cannot act otherwise than under the idea of its own freedom as would bind a being that was actually free. Thus we can escape here from the burden that weights upon theory. [Kant, *Groundwork* Ak. 4:448]
3. [It is not up to the philosopher] ... whether he wants to remove the seeming conflict or leave it untouched; for in the latter case the theory would be *bonum vacans* [unoccupied goods] into possession of which the fatalist could justifiably enter and chase all morals from its supposed property, as occupying it without title. [Kant, *Groundwork* Ak. 4:456]

Questions

1. Think about Michael’s reading at the opening of the section of the passage from *Groundwork* 4:448. Yes, there appears to be a distinction between being free “in a practical respect” and being “truly free,” as Michael suggests at p. 73. But even in the passage he quotes there is a phrase that seems to bring them together. To be free “*in a practical respect*” is for all laws of freedom to hold for a person “just as if his will had validly been pronounced free also in itself and in theoretical philosophy.” So, what distinction really remains?
2. What can we say about the distinction between a defense and an explanation?

Comments

3.4 Transcendental Idealism (76-82)

Summary

Kant’s solution to fatalism and Spinozism depends on Transcendental Idealism. The relevant part of TI that Kant is depending upon, according to Michael, is the part according to which our knowledge of the physical world is knowledge of appearances, and relatedly that space and time themselves are appearances instead of things-in-themselves. How does this work? Not the way Schopenhauer

suggests. He thinks that the noumenal self chooses its character and that, although we can explain people's faults as the result of some feature of their character, since that feature was chosen by the noumenal self, the person is ultimately responsible for it. But this requires Porphyrean gymnastics, and probably reincarnation. Michael has a different account (79ff). It depends upon the idea that, although an exhaustive investigation of people's wills would allow us to *predict with certainty* their actions, nevertheless those actions are not necessitated. The explanation of their actions, in other words, would be *complete* even though they would not *necessitate* the actions being explained. It amounts to an "underdetermination of theory by data" (82).

Interesting Passages Cited

Questions

Comments

3.5 Initiating a Series of Appearances (82-84)

Summary

The explanation given in the previous section depends upon the Third Antinomy and its apparently mysterious claim that "we may regard actions as *initiating* series of appearance" (82). It follows from this, according to Kant, that "particular spontaneous origins in the course of the world's process are also possible" (82). This allows us to say that a person's action "follows upon" the antecedent course of his life without "arising out of it."

Interesting Passages Cited

Questions

Comments

Notes from Session

Mahmud: On the distinction between a defense and an explanation of our transcendental freedom.