

Notes on Rosen Chapter 6
Dunster House Faculty Dean Residence
2nd Floor Office
Wednesday October 18, 2023
6:00 a.m.

To begin with, here's an outline of the sections in chapter 6.

1. From Heaven to History (144-188)
 - 1.1. "Die Weltgeschichte ist das Weltgericht" (144-145)
 - 1.2. Kant and the "Highest Good" (145-148)
 - 1.3. Kantian "*Recht*" and the "Church Invisible" (148-152)
 - 1.4. Schiller (152-155)
 - 1.5. Herder (156-160)
 - 1.6. Fichte (160-163)
 - 1.7. The Oldest System-Programme (164-168)
 - 1.8. The Addresses to the German Nation (168-171)
 - 1.9. Hegel and Immortality (171-181)
 - 1.10. *Geist* and the Individual (181-188)

Overview

The goal of the chapter is to characterize the way in which, and the degree to which, the German Idealists make the transition from heaven to history. Specifically, Rosen argues that although it is true that the Idealists "find ideals in secular history that correspond to what had previously been the prerogative of a transcendent deity" (145), the move from the latter to the former is not just a matter of transferring what was formerly understood of God's role in grounding the possibility of human transcendence, to an equivalent role played by the transition of *Geist* to a moment of "historical immortality." Rather, the question whether the story about *Geist's* self-transformation over the period of world history is meant complement or supplant the orthodox religious doctrines of personal immortality is a contested one. The chapter sets up two extreme views and then offers a kind of contested middle ground for Hegel. On the one hand Kant, Herder, and Fichte, on MR's interpretation of them, see the providential character of history to complement a belief in personal immortality. On the other hand, Schiller, Forberg, and the author of the *Oldest System-Program* (who was perhaps Hegel himself, as a young man!), imagine the idea of providential history as an alternative or a substitute for personal immortality. (See 176ff.) Michael offers "significant systematic reasons to think that the mature Hegel ... confines himself exclusively to a historical conception of immortality" (180). He then lays out a possible interpretation of this historical conception that resists the reduction of individual human beings to mere, dispensable, "moments" in the progress of *Geist* and instead favors a universalist Hegel of the "moderately progressive reform-minded liberal" type (183). But he claims that such a Whiggish view of Hegel is incompatible with five, clear-cut aspects of his work.

1. "Die Weltgeschichte ist das Weltgericht" (144-145)

Summary

German Idealism builds on Kant's view of history to develop an account according to which the history of the world (*Weltgeschichte*) is the Last Judgment (*Weltgerichte*) concerning what is right. This is one of the most famous ideas in Hegel, even though he never quite says it that way. But what does this idea of history involve? One possibility is that it just amounts to the view the *might is right*. Whoever wins the final power struggle for control of the human world, at the end of history, will have determined what counts the nature of justice and the right. (Think of book I of Plato's *Republic* – this is roughly Thrasymachus's view.) MR thinks this is not the right interpretation of Hegel. To see the right interpretation, we have to go back to look again at Kant.

Interesting Passages Cited

Questions

Comments

2. Kant and the “Highest Good” (145-148)

Summary

Kant is often presented as a “libertarian Stoic.” That is, as someone who believes that pleasure and pain don't matter at all, since the only important thing is that one freely chooses to do one's duty. MR offers an interpretation, by contrast, according to which the highest good for a human being involves the “proportional relationship between happiness and moral worth” (146). On Kant's view, we can't ever know for sure whether we've done our duty, since doing our duty involves having the right *motivations* for our actions, and these are never certain for us. But we can know for sure that our actions have moral worth only when they are “performed for the sake of duty alone” (147), and that is not only possible but something we can hope for.

Interesting Passages Cited

Questions

1. What is the relation between the good will being the “highest good,” and its being the only thing that “can be considered to be good “without limitation” (*ohne Einschränkung*)” (145)? MR seems to be using these interchangeably, but it's not obvious that they are the same. Is there evidence that Kant is using them to mean the same?

Comments

3. Kantian “*Recht*” and the “Church Invisible” (148-152)

Summary

Perfect justice, for Kant, is unachievable. That's because we can never know what even our own motivations are, so we can never know whether our will is good. Thus, we can never know whether the proportion between our happiness and our will is just. Still, “the pursuit of justice – the attempt to allocate pleasure and pain in accordance with desert – is indeed a viable project” (149), on MR's interpretation of Kant. This suggests that Kant is not the founder of modern liberal political philosophy, as he is often taken to be (and as Sandel (following Rawls?) claims about him).

Liberalism, as Rawls develops it, is anti-perfectionist. That is, it doesn't think that the state should be involved in making it possible for people to become better versions of themselves. But MR's version of Kant, although it certainly has this strand, also has "a much more perfectionist conception of moral community, one that develops through time" (150). Indeed, the "church invisible" on MR's interpretation of Kant, just is the group of human beings "working together under providential guidance" (152) towards the end of perfecting themselves and their community. For Kant, the two ideals of a Last Judgment and an afterlife, on the one hand, and a "kingdom of God on earth," on the other, exist side by side.

Interesting Passages Cited

Questions

Comments

1. Think about the debate between Rawls and Cavell over perfectionism. Is Kant's form of perfectionism different from the Emersonian perfectionism that Cavell defends? Would they differ in their debate with Rawls or the Rawlsian Kant?

4. Schiller (152-155)

Summary

Interesting Passages Cited

Questions

Comments

5. Herder (156-160)

Summary

Interesting Passages Cited

Questions

Comments

6. Fichte (160-163)

Summary

Interesting Passages Cited

Questions

Comments

7. The Oldest System-Programme (164-168)

Summary

Interesting Passages Cited

Questions

Comments

8. The Addresses to the German Nation (168-171)

Summary

Interesting Passages Cited

Questions

Comments

9. Hegel and Immortality (171-181)

Summary

There are at least three kinds of Hegel interpretation: Theistic, Metaphysical, and Social. Michael is in favor of the metaphysical interpretation (174). On this view, the metaphysical aspect of the project is required for it to be the kind of “theodicy” that Hegel claims it is (176).

Interesting Passages Cited

Questions

Comments

10. *Geist* and the Individual (181-188)

Summary

Interesting Passages Cited

Questions

Comments