

Notes on Rosen Chapter 8
Dunster House Faculty Dean Residence
2nd Floor Office
Wednesday November 1, 2023
5:45 a.m.

To begin with, here's an outline of the sections in chapter 8.

1. Philosophy in History (230-260)
 - 1.1. Kant and Hegel: A Brief Review (230-234)
 - 1.2. Hegel and Marx on Philosophy and History (234-238)
 - 1.3. Philosophy as a *Lebensform* (238-243)
 - 1.4. The Ways of Paradox (243-245)
 - 1.5. After Hegel? (245-248)
 - 1.6. Immortality, Freedom and Moral Disagreement (248-251)
 - 1.7. The Turning of the Tide (251-255)
 - 1.8. Some Questions (256-260)

Overview

The central interpretive work of MR's book took place in chapters 3-7. It is now over. In chapter 8, after a brief summary of the main points of MR's interpretation of Kant and Hegel, we move onto the broader objective of the book. That is to show how this re-interpretation of Kant and the post-Kantian movement of German Idealism helps to "illuminate the broader process of secularization" (234). At the core of the project, therefore, is not just an historical account of what positions were taken in 18th and 19th century German philosophy, but an account of how those positions both exemplified and furthered a relationship between philosophy and society. We cannot see this relationship in Hegel and Marx's own appropriation of the Kantian philosophy, which is both tendentious and at the same time unilluminating, according to MR. Their contention that social forms in a given society are either "emanations of a single principle" (Hegel, 238) or that philosophy itself is "a passive reflection of what is going on elsewhere in society" (Marx, 238) leave no interesting way to conceive of philosophy as "socially embedded" (234-38). The chapter goes on to present such a conception, in its section on Philosophy as a *Lebensform* (literally a "form of life," but more broadly a "way of coming to terms with the world" (238)), and then shows how the way of coming to terms with the world that is characteristic of Kant and German Idealism involves a very particular "conflict of *doxa?*" (244). It then goes on to trace the effects of this movement in philosophy after Hegel, focusing especially on Kierkegaard, Marx, and Nietzsche. MR argues that, far from explaining the "sense of loss" that is so central to the process of secularization, these thinkers have only deepened it. (This is especially true about Marx, and to some degree true about Nietzsche, but MR doesn't much explore the Kierkegaardian response except to mention its ambition to "break with rationalism" (245).) We end the chapter with some questions, before preparing for a final, substantive chapter of the book that promises to give us better resources for responding to the "troubling and puzzling world in which we now find ourselves" (260).

1. Kant and Hegel: A Brief Review (230-234)

Summary

This section offers a summary of the main interpretive theses that MR's presentation of Kant, Hegel, and the tradition of post-Kantian German Idealism has landed upon. This starts with the claim that Kant, as MR presents him, is not a secular thinker but, on the contrary, is deeply motivated by a kind of theism. Specifically, his project originates in his belief in a just God – “one who rewards and punishes human beings as they deserve” (230). This generates three principles for Kant, on MR's interpretation of him.

1. Human beings must *know* what is required of them. (230)
2. Morality must be understood by human beings to be *intrinsically good*. (Thus, Kant takes the “Platonic” side of the Euthyphro dilemma.) (231)
3. Human being must be free: they must be “capable of following or failing to follow the requirements of morality” (231), so that a notion of their *responsibility* for their actions can make sense.

These principles, and Kant's way of working them out, follow from his theistic commitments. Strangely, however, the project that was motivated by Kant's theism ends up being a *secularizing* one. That is because, to justify God's reward and punishment of us, Kant must tell a story that relieves us from the alienation of *arbitrariness*. In doing so, however, he introduces a picture that has the alienation of *impersonality* at its core.

Hegel, for his part, continues a range of Kantian themes. Specifically, he embraces Kant's idea that “to be free is to be fully self-determined” (232). Hegel is also, like Kant, a “moral universalist” (233). That is to say, *Geist* and its history, for Hegel, unify morality for human beings. That said, it is difficult to see how Hegel's project is a form of *theodicy*, despite his claim that it is. That leaves two questions:

1. Is mere knowability sufficient for goodness? (233).
 - a. Hegel believes it is, which suggests that he is working from a form of Platonism or neo-Platonism about knowledge, according to which “the highest kind of knowledge is a kind of self-alignment” (233).
2. What about the fact that the kind of knowability Hegel makes room for is available only to the philosopher and not everyone? (233-4).
 - a. Hegel addresses this issue, but at the cost of a potentially dangerous form of nationalism. Collective self-identification through *Sittlichkeit* is not only good but necessary.
 - i. For Hegel, according to MR, “in doing my duty as it comes to me through law and custom, I am ‘by myself and free’” (234).

Interesting Passages Cited

Questions

Comments

2. Hegel and Marx on Philosophy and History (234-238)

Summary

Hegel and Marx are both interested in the idea that philosophy and history are intertwined with one another. In that sense, both aim to give us resources to understand and explain the process of secularization that society has been undergoing at least since the Enlightenment. But MR argues that does that well. Hegel's view, that philosophy is "its time captured in Thought" ("*ihre Zeit in Gedanken erfassl*") (quoted on 234), leads to the idea that society is merely the expression of whatever underlying principle governs the age. But this depends upon the idea that there is "a unity picture of the social whole at any one time" (235), which MR finds to be empirically false. By contrast, Marx sees philosophy as a mere "reflex and echo" (235) of the material conditions of the world. But this leaves us with the sad position that "any attempt to practice politics from the point of view of the common good is no more than idle sentimentality" (237-8). We need an alternative!

Interesting Passages Cited

1. Morality, religion, metaphysics, all the rest of ideology and their corresponding forms of consciousness ... have no history, no development" (235, Marx and Engels, *The German Ideology*, pp. 26-7 in the vol. 3 of *Werke*).

Questions

1. Can we state more clearly what the criticisms of Hege and Marx are?

Comments

3. Philosophy as a *Lebensform* (238-243)

Summary

Philosophy and society are related neither by the second being an expression of the underlying principle of the first (Hegel) nor by the first simply mirroring the material conditions of the second (Marx). Rather philosophy is a part of the broader cultural project of offering to the members of society "ways of making sense of the world that render life acceptable to them" (239). In this sense, philosophy is what Goethe called a *Lebensform*. Literally, we can translate this as a "form of life." But Goethe describes it more generally as a "way of coming to terms with the world" ("*mit der Welt fertig warden,*" 238). But if culture as a whole is involved in this kind of *reconciliation* with the world, or with our suffering and death in it, then what is the distinctive role that philosophy has to play? The answer is that philosophy is in general, since Plato, is in has been committed to the idea that "knowledge brings reconciliation" (240). The German Idealists revivify this interpretation of philosophy, on MR's view, and aim to create philosophical systems that give a solution to the problem of theodicy: "to justify belief in the world as the product of an omnipotent and benevolent creator" (242).

Interesting Passages Cited

Questions

Comments

4. The Ways of Paradox (243-245)

Summary

Interesting Passages Cited

Questions

Comments

5. After Hegel? (245-248)

Summary

Interesting Passages Cited

Questions

Comments

6. Immortality, Freedom and Moral Disagreement (248-251)

Summary

Interesting Passages Cited

Questions

Comments

7. The Turning of the Tide (251-255)

Summary

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8. Some Questions (256-260)

Notes from the Session

Harith: I appreciated this chapter because it helped me understand better the context for MR's project.