

Dear Professor Stern,

November 8, 1982

The following items are enclosed:

1. Four copies of the latest, if not final, draft of my prospectus.
Please note the Addendum, which represents an attempt to boil down my thesis to its essence.
2. One copy of some thoughts on Marx, et al. This is partly a development of our brief discussion of the problem of the ethical dimension of historical agency, and partly an indication, from my perspective, of where my thesis ~~may~~^{might} go (or might go under).
3. A copy of a very rough draft of a proposal for a thesis in film aesthetics. This proposal is intended as a possible fall-back if we find that my last-minute doubts about the current thesis are well-founded or if the committee should find the prospectus for the current thesis unacceptable.

"A thoughtful person," writes Kant, "is acquainted with a kind of distress which threatens his moral fibre, a kind of distress of which the thoughtless know nothing: discontent with Providence which governs the course of this world. This distress he is apt to feel when he considers the evils which oppress the human species so heavily and, apparently, so hopelessly. It is true that Providence has assigned to us a toilsome road on earth. But it is of the utmost importance that we should nevertheless be content, partly in order that we may gather courage even in the midst of toils, partly in order that we should not lose sight of our own failings."¹ My thesis will largely be concerned with making sense of this passage and with tracing some of its implications.

Kant seems to be saying that we are bound to be dissatisfied with the apparent pointlessness of the spectacle of evils which the world presents to us, assuming that we are thoughtful persons. Given that the thoughtful are indeed distressed by the spectacle of evil in the world, is there a way, Kant wonders, of giving point to, comprehending, or discerning a meaning or purpose in the parade of evils in human history? And will this way of making sense give the thoughtful enough, but only enough, consolation to continue along their "toilsome road"? According to Kant, there seem to be at least two ways in which a thoughtful person can try to comprehend evil in the world. He can try to formulate a philosophy of history, which would make evil intelligible in terms of a plan or plot which works itself out during the course of history. Or he can try to formulate a theodicy, which would make evil intelligible in terms of God's activity and purposes.

For Kant, then, it seems likely that one will sooner or later turn to philosophy of history or to theodicy for consolation, given that one is a thoughtful person confronted with the spectacle of evil in the world. There are two significant sorts of objection to Kant's position, however. The first sort of objection could be entitled "sceptical" or "Humean," and the second sort "dogmatic" or "Hegelian." The sceptic is willing to grant the dissatisfaction of the thoughtful person, but takes the turn to philosophical sources of consolation to be philosophically unsuccessful if not morally dangerous. For the sceptic, the daily routines of custom and habit, the backgammon-table and the counting-house, are the only legitimate sources of consolation for the thoughtful person facing the spectacle of evil. The dogmatist, on the other hand, demands consolation from philosophical sources, but will not tolerate Kant's separation of philosophy of history and theodicy. Hegel identifies them, asserts that philosophy of history is "the true theodicy,"² and claims to have demonstrated that the plan within which the course of evils in history becomes intelligible is really God's plan. To show how Kant would reply to the Humean and Hegelian objections, one would have to show how and why he thinks that philosophy of history and theodicy are legitimate but fundamentally different sources of consolation.

What is philosophy of history, according to Kant? Philosophy of history is an attempt to treat the apparently aimless course of evils in human history as if it were a part of a plan of Nature. It is important to note the use of the expressions "Nature," "plan," and "as if." "Nature" appears to be used in a metaphorical sense

similar to that of the Romantic expression "Mother Nature."

"Plan" denotes a pattern or direction defined by Nature's purpose and given to the course of evils in history. "As if" recalls Kant's doctrine of teleological judgment. According to this doctrine, determinative judgments, such as "A causes B," may have a constitutive function, in so far as they make a legitimate claim about the way the world really is. Reflective judgments, such as "teeth are for chewing," make no claim about the way the world really is, but may have a regulative function in so far as they make a legitimate claim about the way we need to think about the world. For Kant, a judgment of purpose may not be constitutively employed, for it can make no legitimate claim about the actual character of the world. But a judgment of purpose may be regulatively employed when it does not make this claim. For human beings cannot avoid thinking of certain kinds of natural and historical objects, such as parts of the human body and revolutions, as if they served purposes. There are two reasons why we have a legitimate need to think of the world in this way, even though we cannot legitimately claim that the world or any of its objects really does serve a purpose. On the one hand, as scientific inquirers we have a cognitive interest in employing judgments of purpose to guide our investigations to completeness in such domains as biology and history. As Haskell Fain³ and G.H. von Wright⁴ have shown, even the most mechanistic type of causal explanation of historical events requires that the historian situate the events to be explained in the minimal pattern of a narrative or story-line. Interpretation or teleological understanding is the beginning of

all explanation, causal or otherwise. On the other hand, as moral agents we have a practical interest in employing judgments of purpose to orient our actions in the apparently chaotic historical present.

What is theodicy, according to Kant? If by "theodicy" he means making evil intelligible in terms of Divine Providence or God's activity and purposes, it is clear that for Kant, theodicy is distinct from philosophy of history. Philosophy of history discerns a plan in the course of history, but it is not God's plan. Moreover, unlike a theodicy, which seems to include a determinative claim that historical events actually serve God's purposes, philosophy of history makes only a reflective or regulative claim about Nature's purposes. A further distinction, between authentic theodicy and doctrinal theodicy, is made by Kant in his discussion of theodicy. He argues that any doctrinal theodicy, or attempt to defend Divine Providence by ratiocination, must fail.⁵ For either the arguments brought in God's defense are fallacious, or their premises are verifiable by evidence to which our experience gives us no legitimate access. Authentic theodicy, which rests on faith rather than reason or experience and is exemplified in the Book of Job, is shown to have legitimate status, but more as a part of rational faith than in philosophy of history. The relation of rational faith to philosophy of history in Kant is a subject of some debate, and the question whether this relation provides a back-door entry for theodicy into philosophy of history in Kant needs to be considered.

Kant's defense of authentic theodicy and of reflective

judgments of purpose in philosophy of history constitutes his answer to the sceptical or Humean objection. In order to clarify his response to the dogmatic or Hegelian objection, it is necessary to ask just what is at stake for Kant in the exclusion or separation of theodicy from philosophy of history. What is at stake for Kant on this issue can be seen by mentioning some consequences of taking our judgments of purpose in history as constitutive rather than merely reflective, as proponents of doctrinal theodicies are wont to do.

If we mean in making a teleological judgment that historical events actually do serve a purpose, then the program of causal explanation in historiography goes down the drain. In order for historical events to be related as causes and effects, they must actually be or be constituted as contingently related or at least logically independent of each other. But this fundamental condition of the possibility of causal explanation is cast aside if we constitute historical events as oriented towards an end, for then we are claiming that these events are logically interdependent. This claim might seem inconsistent with the previous claim that causal explanation depends on teleological understanding or judgment. The apparent inconsistency is removed when we realize that teleological judgments, taken in their reflective mode, provide only a narrative framework within which historical events must first be situated for there to be any explanation at all. With respect to the writing of history, the sceptical rejection of teleological judgment leaves us with mere chronicles, while the dogmatic employment of it leaves us with nothing more

scientific than astrology. Kant's doctrine of teleological judgment is meant to secure historiography from the latter fate no less than the former.

Perhaps even more important for Kant are the moral consequences of the failure to adhere to this doctrine. Kant conceives of the moral life as an ongoing effort to promote the realization of a purpose, namely, the highest good. Though it is not logically impossible that God has set this purpose for us and will ultimately have a share in its complete realization, Kant claims that this purpose is in any case discoverable by reason alone and that we are obligated as free, rational beings to promote its realization. But if we employ a determinative judgment of purpose in order to console ourselves with the prospect of God's direction of historical events towards the highest good, then we console ourselves too much. For our task is precisely to remain on the "toilsome road" of the moral life by promoting the realization of this purpose ourselves. This claim might seem inconsistent with the previous claim that teleological judgments help us to orient our actions in an apparently chaotic world. However, such judgments, taken in their reflective mode, merely provide a context in the historical present within which we can meaningfully promote the realization of the highest good. With respect to the moral life, Kant's doctrine of teleological judgment is meant to show that the mere habit and custom of the sceptic does not provide an adequate historical context for action, but that providing such a context need not land us in the dogmatic moral universe of Divinely pre-established stations and harmonies.

Notes.

1. Kant, Immanuel, Conjectural Beginning of Human History, tr. by E.L. Fackenheim, in Kant on History, ed. by L.W. Beck (Indianapolis: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, Inc., 1957), p. 66.
2. Hegel, G.W.F., The Philosophy of History, tr. by J. Sibree (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1956), p. 457.
3. Fain, Haskell, Between Philosophy and History: The Resurrection of Speculative Philosophy of History within the Analytic Tradition (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1970).
4. von Wright, G.H., Explanation and Understanding (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1971).
5. Kant, Immanuel, On the Failure of all Attempted Philosophical Theodicies, tr. by Michael Despland, in Despland, Kant on History and Religion (Montreal and London: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1973), pp. 283-97.

Addendum.

It might be noted that my discussion of Kant's position on philosophy of history and theodicy possesses a certain symmetry. On the one hand, there are two objections to Kant's thesis that thoughtful persons need some sort of philosophical consolation when faced with the spectacle of evil in the world. The sceptic denies the thoughtful person any sort of philosophical consolation, while the dogmatist provides him with the wrong sort. On the other hand, this symmetry is constituted by the presence of the two different spheres of human life, empirical investigation and ethical activity, on which Kant's thesis has a bearing. The maximum claim of Kant's thesis is that empirical investigation and ethical activity will flourish only under the influence of the right sort of philosophical consolation, whose sources are the "critical" rather than the "sceptical" or "dogmatic" sorts of philosophy of history and theodicy.

The symmetry of my discussion of Kant's position is intended only for the purpose of initial clarification. I shall be mainly concerned in my thesis with Kant's response to the dogmatic objection and with the relevance of this response to ethical activity. My discussion of the debate between critical and dogmatic philosophy of history will be guided by the question of the extent to which historical agency possesses an ethical dimension.

Marx on historical agency - some initial reflections

According to Marx, men make history on the basis of given circumstances. But throughout human history thus far, most men have not been aware that they do make history. It has appeared to most men that circumstances make history. These circumstances also have appeared to operate according to the "iron laws" of bourgeois political economy, or independently of conscious human control. The achievement of socialist society will put most men in the position of consciously making history for the first time.

Marx also speaks of laws of historical development, laws which really govern human history. These laws ~~are~~

- a. ^{are} not the same as the "iron laws" of bourgeois political economy which appear to most men to govern the course of human history.
- b. cease to govern historical development when men make history consciously, for the trivial reason that at this point historical development comes to an end.

The revolutionist-evolutionist split seems to arise from the difficulties of conceiving the relationship between conscious human agency and laws of historical development. The evolutionists or inevitablists claim that conscious human agency in history can begin only when historical development comes to an end. The revolutionists or voluntarists claim that some individuals or groups, such as professional revolutionaries or the party, must make history consciously in order to bring historical development to an end. The evolutionists have a problem accounting for the apparent gap between necessary historical development and conscious human agency, which, on this view, are successive rather

than coexistent. If there is a gap between historical development and conscious human agency, what is the nature of the transition from the former to the latter? The revolutionists have a problem with the coexistence of conscious human agency and necessary historical development. If they coexist, in what way are conscious human agency and necessary historical development compatible?

A possible "critical" solution of these problems: perhaps both problems - the "gap" problem of the evolutionists and the "compatibility" problem of the revolutionists - arise from an assumption they share in common. This assumption is the "dogmatic" or "constitutive" claim that a plan of development really does apply to human history. In order to solve the problems of the evolutionists and the revolutionists, one would have to substitute a "regulative" claim about history's plan, a claim which we make for our own purposes only.

Note the similar problems and their resolution in Kant:

1. Prior to the period of enlightenment, the Cunning of Nature tricks men into making history in the way in which reason would have prescribed it to them, had men been capable of listening to reason at the beginning of history.
2. As men become enlightened, or delivered from the "tutelage" of the Cunning of Nature, they begin consciously to do what reason prescribes to them. It does not matter whether the Cunning of Nature and enlightenment are successive or coexistent, however. For Kant takes the plan of Nature in a regulative rather than a constitutive sense.

Does Marx himself take laws of historical development in a constitutive sense? Yes, he has a tendency to do so, and this tendency reverberates in all Marxism, according to Merleau-Ponty.

In order to account for the apparent weight of circumstances in human history, the dialectic must become more realistic, even in the work of Marx himself. Hence, the distinction between the early, "humanistic" Marx and the later, "scientific" Marx. Moreover, this need for realism draws out a return to the naive realism and naturalism of pre-Kantian philosophy, especially in the work of post-Engelsian Marxists. The split between the revolutionists and the evolutionists is symptomatic of this regression to a pre-critical standpoint. For Merleau-Ponty, only in Lukacs' theory of literature is the critical force of the dialectic, or the openness of consciousness to truth, error, and self-criticism, preserved.

1. Does one have to buy the distinction between humanistic socialism and scientific socialism and/or the distinction between Geisteswissenschaften and Naturwissenschaften, in order to preserve the critical standpoint in philosophy of history?

2. Is there a way of interpreting Hegel and Marx, such that their concepts of historical agency have an ethical dimension, though this dimension might be narrower than that belonging to Kant's concept?

3. Does Braudel's concept of historical agency, assuming that it is deeper and truer than Kant's, Hegel's, or Marx's, have any ethical dimension at all?

If the answer to question #1 is "yes" and the answer to questions #2 and #3 is "no," then I think that my thesis is in big trouble. If you agree that it is, then we should talk about the film aesthetics proposal. If you disagree, then please disavow any knowledge of this proposal.

What is the nature of film as art? This question belongs to the field of film aesthetics, and the aim of my thesis is to answer it. The question of the nature of film as art is a species of the more general question of the nature of art. Some traditional philosophers, such as Plato, Tolstoy, and Clive Bell, thought that an answer could be given to the question of the nature of art. Others, such as Lessing and Schopenhauer, went further, thinking that each particular art (sculpture, painting, poetry, etc.) has a nature which distinguishes it from the others. Finally, some traditional film aestheticians, such as Münsterberg, Eisenstein, Arnheim, and Bazin, thought that film as art has its own specific nature, or at least a hybrid of the natures of other arts.

However, some contemporary philosophers, such as Weitz and Kennick, have called into question the attempt to answer the question of the nature of art. Following the lead of Wittgenstein, they argue that questions of the nature or essence of anything are unanswerable, and thus at best pointless and at worst harmful to such first-order endeavors as art criticism. Likewise, some contemporary film aestheticians, such as Perkins and Henderson, claim that attempts to answer the question of the nature of film as art are pointless or even harmful to the work of film criticism.

I believe that there is something right about the critics' attack on traditional attempts to answer the questions of the nature of art and the nature of film as art. Part of my job in showing that the question of the nature of film as art can be answered

is to show just where the critics are right. They are right, I shall argue, only because they buy the concept of nature or essence used by the tradition. The rest of my job in showing that the question of the nature of film as art can be answered is to develop a new concept of nature or essence. I shall take my clues for working out this concept (it hasn't been worked out yet) from the recent work of Mandelbaum, Danto, and some phenomenologists.

Thesis outline.

- I. A. Summary of some traditional attempts to define the nature of art.
 B. Summary of contemporary criticism of these attempts.
 C. Critique of the critique
- II. A. Summary of some traditional attempts to define the nature of film as art.
 B. Summary of contemporary criticism of these attempts.
 C. Critique of the critique.
- III. Formulation and defense of my conception of the nature of film as art.

Bibliography (film aesthetics)

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