Reflection Prompts – Week 3

Monday Readings

Mill’s *On Liberty*

Chp III (some new ones prompted by your comments in class)

- Sarah argued that academic and church institutions should encourage diversity because it enables us to better communicate with the different kinds of people that we will encounter outside of those institutions. So here is the question. Are there any limits to the type of diverse opinions or lifestyles that such institutions should allow to be expressed? If so, is this limitation more restrictive than Mill’s so-called harm principle?
- Having looked through my outline of the argument in Chapter III, where would you challenge my interpretation? Or if you accept my rendering of the argument, where you might you challenge Mill’s argument?
- Is Mill’s account of the need to promote spontaneous human thought and action compatible with what he says about human thought and behavior being amenable to scientific analysis?

Chp IV

- According to Mill, what two legal constraints can a society impose on its citizens? What objection does Mill himself raise against his claim that societies cannot pass laws keeping citizens from harming themselves or others, when that harm does not amount to a violation of another’s rights? How does he attempt to counter this objection?

Wednesday Readings


Marx’s ‘Theses on Feuerbach’ & ‘German Ideology’

- Both Mill and Marx have been characterized as presenting strictly naturalistic accounts of human nature. Consider the following definitions:

  1. *Methodological* naturalism is a position on what counts as a properly scientific explanation. According to this position, scientific explanations can only invoke causal processes that are empirical observational, repeatable and testable. In other words, sciences ought not to appeal to supernatural causal agents to explain phenomena.
2. *Epistemological* naturalism is a position on what kinds of methods or procedures result in genuine knowledge. According to this position, the methods currently used in the natural sciences are our best (only?) methods for obtaining knowledge about what exists.

3. *Ontological* naturalism is a position on what exists. This position claims that no supernatural entities or processes exist.

Given these definitions, how would you characterize Mill or Marx’s account of human nature?

Patrick Gardiner, editor of your text, claims that Marx was part of a movement to present a materialistic or ‘naturalistic’ reading of Hegelian philosophy. Present textual evidence for this interpretation of what Marx is up to and decide whether or not you agree with this interpretation of Marx.

Finally, discuss the pros and cons of naturalistic approaches to studying the thought and behavior of human beings.

**Friday Readings**

Marx’s ‘Alienated Labor’ and excerpt from *Communist Manifesto*

- According to Marx, what are the three ways in which a worker experiences alienated labor? Can you give a concrete contemporary example of these forms of alienation?

- Having read ‘Alienated Labor’ and the excerpt from the *Communist Manifesto*, describe and explain Marx’s account of the struggle between bourgeoisie and the proletariat as a particular form of the master-slave relationship described by Hegel. What are the differences and similarities between the two accounts?