

## Author's Response

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It is a privilege to receive such thoughtful and thought-provoking comments and especially gratifying to see the ways in which my interlocutors have taken up different aspects of my book for interrogation. It makes me hope that one of my objectives—to say something that will be of interest to people coming from a variety of different perspectives—may be successful. Whether the book succeeds in persuading them of its views is another matter, of course. In any case, I am deeply grateful.

### ***Response to Friedman***

Friedman's comments center on a single, penetrating and profound, question that resonates with interpretations given throughout the book. Is it true that at the heart of Kant's project is the drive to overcome what *The Shadow of God* calls "the alienation of arbitrariness" (194) or is it not rather that what matters for Kant (and, after him, Hegel) is externality? After all, if human beings were fully rationally determined but by a predetermined divine necessity they would have, as Kant says, no more than the "freedom of the turnspit." I agree that for Kant, nonarbitrariness is not sufficient for human freedom. But I cannot agree that that means that it is not necessary. After all, the wrongdoer who acts culpably, in Kant's view, is responsible because their act originates in their own agency rather than outside themselves in the natural order, but they are nevertheless still not fully free because of the arbitrariness in the motivation of their actions. At the end of her contribution, Friedman reflects that her account would bring Kant (and Hegel and Marx) closer to a Hobbesian view of freedom as the mere absence of external constraint. Here we part company. A freedom based solely in agential power would not, to my mind, do justice to the Kantian conception of autonomy. To put it in the language of the book, the *nomos* would have been shrunk into the *autos*.

### ***Response to Keum***

The short answer to one of Keum's perceptive questions—why talk about *doxai*?—is, as she rightly notes, that *doxa* is meant to be "a deliberately

expansive term" (000). In *On Voluntary Servitude* I traced a story in which the theory of ideology could be seen as containing the legacy—inverted and no longer associated with God—of eighteenth-century providentialism: the idea of society as containing threads of causal consequences held together by an overarching purposive structure. I called providentialism there a "background belief".<sup>1</sup> I would now call it a *doxa* because I have come to realize that *doxai* are not always in the background and not always beliefs. I might compare my view with Quine's well-known metaphor of the "web of belief." As a holist and a pragmatist, Quine thinks of human knowledge as a complex lattice-work of mutual interconnections with logic standing at its center. Although logic is thus as protected from refutation as anything can be it is not in any way particularly hidden or in the background.

But Quine is also a positivist: he thinks of the human mind as essentially a knowledge-machine. I reject that restrictive picture. For me, culture contains knowledge, of course, but also values, desires, practices, norms, and feelings. If our question is "What keeps people going in a society?"—theodicy in the very broadest sense—the answer may be the doctrines of a monotheistic religion or an intellectualistic commitment to science and human progress, but it might just as well be child rearing, sports, architecture, gardening, storytelling, or ritual feasting. I am interested in philosophy and I do think that the rationalism and the critical spirit it represents are fundamental to the understanding of Western culture. But I do not want to preempt or essentialize the study of culture by assuming with Hegel the necessary primacy of this intellectual (philosophical-scientific) part of it. Hence *doxai*, not "beliefs." And while some significant *doxai* (historical immortality, for example) are in the background, others—that human beings "are born free and equal in dignity and rights"—are about as public and prominent as it is possible for beliefs to be.

### *Response to Bejan*

As Bejan points out, *The Shadow of God* raises deep methodological problems. There are, I think, the outlines of answers to some of her questions in the book but she is right to want to hear more. Ultimately, I think, the methodological issues arise from the book's objective of using history in the service of philosophy while embedding philosophy within history, but without subsuming the two within an overarching, Hegelian metaphysics. My book does not see philosophy as a self-enclosed discipline, pursuing its questions (with what seems to be such a notable lack of success) in isolation from social practice. If societies, in the end and most broadly, need to give their members a "theodicy" (a way of coming to terms with the facts of suffering and

<sup>1</sup>Michael Rosen, *On Voluntary Servitude: False Consciousness and the Theory of Ideology* (Cambridge: Polity, 1996), chap. 8.

human finitude) and if philosophies can be seen as “forms of life,” then philosophy, in that sense at least, will extend across society. The conflicts of philosophy and between philosophies can be seen, at least in part, as the reflection of different ways in which human beings “come to terms with the world.”

There is no single right answer to the question of where that leaves the task of the intellectual historian. Working outwards from Kant’s texts to questions about God, freedom, and immortality and, through that, to a wider transformation in ways of seeing the world seems fruitful to me but might not be so in the case of, say, Frege or Carnap.

“History,” for me, is not an artifact of the activity of historians. Even before the beginnings of narrated history, human societies had histories, in my opinion. But human beings’ understanding of themselves as having a past and a future, whenever that arose, was, of course, transformative. From then on familiar further changes could get underway: the writing down of history by named individuals; the attempt to separate history “as it really was” from myth; seeing particular histories as ingredients in what is, in the end, a “history of mankind”; asking whether history has a directionality or even a kind of agency. One does not have to answer yes to those final questions, however, to see history as not just constituted by what historians write.

And what is the point of it all? More narrowly: Why read Kant today? Is he a guide or an Awful Warning? To my mind, he is neither. On the one hand, “to look to find in Kant a ‘decision procedure for ethics’ is to enlist him in a project that is ours, not his” (109). On the other, there is surely a sense that Kant’s idea of the imperative to respect the intrinsic value of human agency remains as compelling today as it ever was, even if we might not formulate it exactly in his terms. I argue that for Kant, respect for human agency is anchored within a philosophical system many of whose other features (moral unanimism, belief in transcendental freedom, retributivism, divine punishment) are much less congenial. Does that mean that we must now abandon respect for agency? No. Still, perhaps it does show that we must find other foundations for it—or, if none can be found, accept that it is simply a basic, foundationless commitment on our part.

### *Response to Taylor*

*The Shadow of God* was deliberately not written as a debate with other thinkers, but my differences with Taylor (and my debt to him as my teacher) run through the book. Our agreements are also important, however, and I start by noting two of them. I do not dispute the idea that there has been, in some sense, “moral progress,” even if I would not give the same account of it as he does. I agree that a world in which it is axiomatic that slavery is wrong is a better world than one in which it is practiced and justified, although I am not persuaded that that is because our world has grasped a

truth that Aristotle, Saint Paul, and many, many others were blind to. I agree too that we can see a thread of critical thinking running through the Western tradition and that this has explanatory value in understanding the emergence of the modern world. I call this “Socratism” and it seems to me pretty much what Taylor himself means by “the eruption of radical criticism into human history” (000).

The picture that Taylor gives is that moral progress is based on the erosion of particularisms: the emergence of an idea of a universal good, giving “a standpoint outside the existing society from which it could be criticized” (000). If authority comes ultimately from this one, universal good, those who exercise authority must do so as its interpreters and executors rather than for any intrinsic qualities of their own. Although the forces of reaction and regression are not to be underestimated, this is the dynamic underlying moral progress. In many ways this comes close to the conception of the Enlightenment project that we find in Kant and whose dialectic is one of the central points of my book to trace. The drive for explanation and justification is part of Kant’s heroic struggle against the “alienation of arbitrariness” — the sense of being “the plaything of alien forces” (194), whether those are the forces of nature that human beings neither comprehend nor control, or authorities, human or divine, to whose mere will they are expected to submit. Yet, I argue, the threat is that this will prove too corrosive. Indeed, the “Socratic” project of explanation and justification and the project of reconciliation have threatened to come apart from one another ever since the beginning of the Western tradition.

Although the Greek idea of an objective *logos* (either embodied in the world or located in a transcendent realm to which humans have access through their intellectual powers) is certainly at work in the Abrahamic religions, it has been constantly in tension there with conceptions that invite reconciliation through submission to the will of a deity who is believed to be benevolent as a matter of faith but cannot be subjected to human scrutiny—not least because of the difficulty of giving a rational justification of the existence of evil within the monotheistic perspective.

There is a great deal more to be said about this and I think that my book says a lot of it. But I should note that Taylor has always been one of the most eloquent critics of the drive to eliminate particularity. As he wrote in his book on Hegel:

The modern ideology of equality and of total participation leads to a homogenization of society. This shakes men loose from their traditional communities, but cannot replace them as a focus of identity. . . . The only real cure for this malady, a recovery of meaningful differentiation, is closed for modern society precisely because of its commitment to ideologies which constantly press it towards greater homogeneity.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup>Charles Taylor, *Hegel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975), 414.

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I would quarrel with the phrase “a recovery of meaningful differentiation.” Was there ever really such a “meaningful differentiation”—a hierarchy sanctioned by reason—or were there only customary or coercively enforced differentiations whose alleged intrinsic “meaningfulness” dissolved when subjected to the requirements of rational justification? There, I think, is where the debate between me and Taylor should go next.