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Theoretical or Practical?

Philosophers like Plato, Aristotle, and George Berkeley have debated questions about the best moral systems and the equality of man. Georg Hegel and Karl Marx specifically impacted philosophy, because of their views on equality. Hegel’s theoretical philosophy was created by a group of German Idealists setting the foundation for universal equality, while Marx furthered philosophy by practically implementing his views of equality into society.

German Idealism was a movement and a philosophical view point created by Friedrich Jacobi, Karl Reinhold, Gottlob Schulze, Johann Fichte, Friedrich Schelling, Friedrich Schleiermacher, Salomon Maimon, and Georg Hegel. The German Ideology was revised by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels in 1845, where they “contrast their new materialist method of idealism that had characterized previous German thought” (Stanford). Because there was only Marx and Engels reworking the German Ideology, Marx had more ideas applied than Hegel.

The transcendental views of Hegel shows the absolute equality of man. His philosophy was interpreted to a social contract theory where a judicial system would enforce laws by having the action reciprocated. An example of this would be; if Person A steals from Person B, than Person B is morally obligated to steal from Person A. Marx believed that because everyone was equal, there would be no judicial system needed because there would be no crime.

After Hegel’s death, his students started interpreting his philosophy of religion two different ways. One group would argue that he talks about how God is the absolute spirit and Christianity is the absolute religion; however, the other group believed he talked about the emancipation of mankind. Although many students believed Hegel believed in God, Marx believed that “religion is the opiate of the people, a harmful, illusion-generating painkiller” (Stanford). Marx would write in his critique of Hegel, openly opposing Hegel’s views and talks about how mankind created God in their own image instead of God creating us in his image.

Hegel’s early perception on the nature of philosophy was based around his religious meanings. An article about Hegel’s life states that “Hegel’s form of idealism, on this account, lies in his idea that the mind of God becomes actual only via its particularization in the minds of his finite material creatures. Thus, in our consciousness of God, we somehow serve to realize his own self-consciousness and thereby, his own perfection” (Stanford). Hegel’s idea that philosophy could only be understood by a higher level of cognitive function shows his theoretical ideas that are only heard by his peers in philosophy, while Marx originated a practical application of his theoretical views to simplify the understanding and improve the reach of his philosophic views into society.

Marx wrote his university thesis on the subject of philosophy which stated that, “the philosophers have only interpreted the world, the point is to change it” (Stanford). In the Preface to his Elements of the Philosophy of Right, Hegel explains that “philosophy is its own time comprehended in thoughts” (Stanford) meaning that philosophy only exists in the mind. Although Hegel believed that philosophy was only understood by highly educated humans, Marx believed that philosophy could be simplified and integrated into society.

Hegel and Marx brought a variety of changes to the perspective on philosophy. Although Hegel had an influence over Marx’s thoughts, Marx changed the world’s view on philosophy by using Hegel’s Philosophy of Right to eliminate the individual possessive rights and socialize the means of production. Marxism overall, has similar features to Hegelianism, but is reinterpreted many Hegelian ideas into a materialistic attitude.

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