

Continental Philosophy as a Conversation with Hegel

Everything “after Hegel was in response to Hegel” (Chapter 8, Continental Tradition 159).

Continental philosophy emerged as a response or “conversation” with Hegelian’s idealism. Two philosophical perspectives emerged to react and response to Hegel’s philosophy. The first one is existentialism, such as reflected in Sartre’s discourses. The second perspective that emerged is phenomenology, which is reflected in the writings of Heidegger. This paper would assess the struggles of this continental philosophy as it converses and reflects on the writings of Hegel. This is very important in order to critically assess the ideas that have emerged in these “conversations” and how its basic assumptions about life could have significant contributions on our understanding of the contemporary society.

Existentialism emphasized the need to make the individual real in the face of realities. This is something that is missing in the abstractions of Hegelian idealism. The world is “irrational and absurd, senseless, trivial and empty” are some of the common concepts that emerged out of this perspective (Chapter 8, Continental Tradition 160). There is a need to assess now if existentialism is in direct contrast with the ideals. This means that existentialism is the extreme negativity of the ideal that Hegel’s philosophy would like to invoke.

Soren Kierkegaard (1813-1855) would offer certain clarifications. In the process of struggling with the ideas of Hegel, continental philosophy is rather a continuum within Hegel. This means that it is responding to gaps in Hegel’s philosophy rather than directly confronting the extremes of Hegel’s ideals. Soren Kierkegaard integrated the individual and their freedom in the face of realities and experiences (Chapter 8, Continental Tradition 161). There is an individual that makes free choices in every situation. In the face of doubt and uncertainty, there is a personal that responds according to their perceived options and choices.

If there is one concept through which Hegel's philosophy is in contrast with continental philosophy is the development of the concept of irrational world. The world is irrational as people struggle against the continuous "despair" (Chapter 8, Continental Tradition 161). This anguish and dread that pervades the existence of humans should be the main concern of philosophy in order to make human more responsive to their situations and guide them in making choices. The point of Kierkegaard is the neglect that the "individual" has received in the attempt of philosophy to seek general truths. Human and the existence of humans are too complex to be encapsulated in general ideas and truths. The richness of human experience should be the site for philosophical analysis.

Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900) also explored similar concept through the *Übermensch*, which is perceived as the ultimate means to escape the irrational world. This concept is the ability of human to have "will-to-power." This is the ability of humans to be creative and be torn away from the submissive nature of human society. He also emphasized that the search of general truths is a waste as there are no general truths. All the facts that people perceive are all interpretations (Chapter 8, Continental Tradition 162). In this perspective the richness of human experience and its complexity is emphasized. When Nietzsche emphasized the humans create values rather than discover values, the point is to emphasize that the individual is the seeker of truth. Once again existentialism developed out of the reaction to Hegel's emphasis on general truths and the rationality of the world.

While existentialism is a reaction to key assumptions of Hegelian idealism, phenomenology is a perspective emerged from the foundations of Hegel's philosophy. In this concept, the emphasis is similar to existentialism, which is the richness of human experience. The truth is received through the sensory experience or what is called as "phenomena" (Chapter

8, Continental Tradition 174). The experience of humans would make sense if there would be an attempt to approach the experience as it is rather than experience the experience through preconceived notions and presuppositions that humans carry with them.

Edmund Husserl (1859-1938) proposed the concept of transcendental phenomenology, which is the emphasis on the experience of the phenomena void from any assumptions about the world (Chapter 8, Continental Tradition 175). In this concept, the personal is attached to the humanity through the pure and objective experience of the situation. Through the abolition of assumption, the experience is reduced to its essence, which is shared by all humans. In this context, is there is any significant conflict or contradiction between existentialism and phenomenology. Looking at the concept of phenomenological reduction, the individual while separate from each other is in co-existence with others through the objective experience of situation.

Heidegger (1889-1976) also called a similar experience of human situations. He emphasized the need for humans to approach situations with fresh eyes and see situations and things in themselves rather than experiencing them with preconceived notions. Heidegger moved away from Husserl's assumptions that phenomena is the source of certainty but rather it is the Being that is the source of this certainty (Chapter 8, Continental Tradition 175). This means that it is the "Being" that defines the experience. The "being" is therefore the main character in the discovery of truth. It is the "being" that ties human together into this objective truth. For Heidegger therefore, this "being" was lost as preconceived notions and assumptions about "others" impede the capacity of humans to really understand the "beingness" of being.

Continental philosophy therefore emerged as a reaction to Hegelian's idealism, which reduced the human condition to general truths and abstractions. Existentialism and

phenomenology emerged as a reaction to the loss of freedom of humans to experience truths. The complexity of human experience means that there is a need to make the individual experience as the site of philosophical analysis. Phenomenology binds humans together as it sought to once again question the human nature as it relates to the “otherness” of being.

Works Cited

Chapter 8, Continental Tradition