

Modernity's Self-Justification

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In a series of books¹ and many articles Robert Pippin has been presenting an interpretation of Hegel and a general theory of modernity. His recent collection (Robert B. Pippin, *Idealism as Modernism: Hegelian Variations*. Cambridge University Press, 1997. xiii+466 pages) presents essays that apply those views to leading philosophers and theorists of our modern predicament. Though contrast with Hegel is a constant theme, most of the essays focus on other thinkers: Kant, Heidegger, Nietzsche, Strauss, Kojève, Blumenberg, and others mentioned along the way. The final essay summarizes what Pippin sees as Hegel's ethical rationalism. Pippin has also provided a thoughtful introduction outlining his views. The essays are all worth reading for their erudition and insight. I have tried to outline Pippin's views and to comment on a number of key issues, but the essays contain richer materials than even a lengthy review can address.

Pippin defends a "simple but fairly sweeping thesis: that the modern European intellectual tradition has not 'culminated in nihilism,' a technological will to power, or a thoughtless hegemonic subjectivism. On the contrary the modern tradition is sustained by a defensible moral aspiration: to live freely." (I 24) These essays defend modernity by developing a theory of spontaneous self-legislating rational subjectivity drawn from Kant and Hegel. This spontaneity provides a rational basis for cognitive and practical norms, and the realization of modern freedom.²

¹ Pippin's books include *Kant's Theory of Form* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981); *Hegel's Idealism: The Satisfaction of Self-Consciousness* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989); *Modernism as a Philosophical Problem: On the Dissatisfactions of European High Culture* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1991); *Idealism as Modernism: Hegelian Variations*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997). In this review essay, references to *Idealism as Modernism* are indicated by "I" and references to *Hegel's Idealism* by "H". *Modernism as a Philosophical Problem* treats many figures and themes found in I and H, with sometimes fuller, sometimes less technical discussions of modernity, Hegel's program, and of Nietzsche, Heidegger, Derrida, and the literary evolution of modernism's dilemmas.

² Modernity includes "the new conception of nature required by modern science; the post-Cartesian notion of mind as subjective consciousness; a political world of passion-driven but rationally calculating individuals, or a 'post-Protestant' world of individually self-reliant, responsible agents; a new political language of rights and equality; and, most of all, a common hope: that a secular, rational basis for moral and political order could be found and safely relied on, could inspire the allegiance and commitment necessary for the vitality and reproduction of a society." (I 2)

Pippin works from a clear conception of today's situation in philosophy. "The decisive modern book in philosophy . . . is Kant's *Critique Of Pure Reason*." (I 222) We cannot go back from Kant, who has undercut any dogmatic appeal to given foundations for legitimacy in cognition or practice. But neither can we stay with Kant. We must extend Kant's notion of apperceptive spontaneity, while shedding those elements of Kant's theory that still appeal to dogmatic givens or untenable dualities.³ "Once Kant's position is rejected, and a Kantian view of the prior tradition accepted, the post-Kantian choices come down to, for all its difficulties, Hegel's narrative account of rationality, or, for want of a better label, Nietzsche."⁴ (I 182n48)

There is a history to these options. Modernity strives to assuage the loss of that classical teleological nature that served as a standard for thought and values. The failures of the old cosmology and politics, and the disenchanted new cosmology and politics, demand "a secure or honest or reliable way to reestablish some connection with that lost world and with other agents." (I 349)

The problem that began in Descartes--how to justify the adoption of a new, rigorous method--quickly became the perennial modern problem: some sort of comprehensive self-reassurance about the modern orientation itself; at once the academic problem of epistemological skepticism and the cultural and political problem of legitimate authority. In the face of the spectacular scientific errors of the premodern tradition⁵, and the collapse of the Christian religion and its political authority into sectarian warfare, we now needed some comprehensive reassurance Eventually Kant's own suspicions of dogmatism were turned against him. . . . The "critical spirit" had begun to devour itself and the project of reassurance was in trouble again. (I 331f).

It would not be unreasonable to expect that, after such a break, only versions of Kant's

³ In extending Kant, Hegel avoids "Kant's overly abstract isolation" of the spontaneous from the receptive aspects of experience (H 86). So "the formula for getting Hegel from Kant would be: Keep the doctrine of pure concepts and the account of apperception that helps justify the necessary presupposition of pure concepts, keep the critical problem of a proof for the objectivity of these concepts, the question that began critical philosophy, but abandon the doctrine of 'pure sensible intuition' and the very possibility of a clear distinction between concept and intuition, and what is left is much of Hegel's enterprise." (H 9)

⁴ Though he argues strongly that these are the only rationally defensible options, Pippin admits that recently "versions of what Kant would have regarded as 'pre-critical' dogmatism, that is, forms of naturalism, psychologism, empiricism, and materialism, have made quite a comeback." (I 16)

⁵ "Modernity . . . did not originate in a willful dissatisfaction with the moderation and self-constraint in the tradition, in fatigue at what was asked. It was provoked by an inability to affirm conscientiously the assumptions on which such a notion of self-constraint was built--nature's teleology, hierarchy, and species-characteristics, all accessible to unaided human reason." (I 255)

transcendentalism, Hegel's historical-dialectical account of reason, and Nietzsche's perspectivism would be on the horizon. (I 255)

This approach to modernity through the loss of natural teleology shows Straussian influence, but Pippin emphatically rejects Strauss's options of "a natural (non-conventional and non-posit) standard for right, or . . . positivism, historicism, nihilism." (I 217) Pippin's essays offer an extended argument for a third alternative: rational social self-making.

Pippin's general strategy is to expand Kant's distinction between following a norm and acting in accordance with a norm. He argues that the thinkers he considers fail to do justice to modern demands for self-consciously established and justified norms. He therefore criticizes many theories of modernity and postmodernity as dogmatic neo-positivism.

Kant showed that "the mind-world relation is spontaneously established, or requires some active comportment underdetermined by such a world, in what must be a norm-governed way . . . that displaces rationalist, empiricist, and naturalist alternatives." (I 13) There is a "necessary discontinuity between the receptivity of sensation and the activity of thinking about sensory matter." (I 33) This spontaneity is not the same as reflexive awareness of objects of inner sense. (I 45) It is not an empirical relation among mental states nor can it be "completely instantiated in a causal system." (I 48)

The German Idealists continued Kant's emphasis on spontaneity, but Fichte and Schelling slid back into metaphysical foundationalism. Pippin's interpretation of Hegel is non-metaphysical: Spirit is not a cosmological subject active before dualisms and expressing itself in them, but rather the self-founding process of social self-justification and self-legitimation.

Hegel rejects Kant's sharp dichotomy between active spontaneity and passive receptivity in cognition and practice. (I 33) There are no pure givens that a spontaneity receives. Self-activity is "not an application of a concept nor a response necessitated or directed by some sensory impingement, nor a postulated ideal. Hegel claims it is like a self-orienting in relation to nature and others." (I 150) But Pippin also admits that

We, as embodied agents in the world, are already natural or at least pre-volitional situated beings, already thinking in a certain way, with a certain inheritance. . . . It is only in being a kind of being, within a certain sort of world with kinds of beings, at a certain historical time, that we could be the particular self-determining subjects or agents. . . . Except insofar as such a 'source' or 'origin' or finitude is self-consciously determined as such, for the subject, it is nothing; it is 'the night in which all cows are black.' (I 405)

In his defense of modern subjectivity and freedom Pippin affirms a normative self-transparency and rationality that go far beyond any Heideggerian resolute taking up of our finite historicity. But the relation of facticity and self-activity remains obscure.

Spontaneous self-legislation plays many roles in Pippin's theory. There is some tension in Pippin's account between a Kantian emphasis on the *possibility* of self-ascription and a Fichtean emphasis on spontaneity as the locus of self-aware modern freedom. A revised transcendental subjectivity and a social practice of norm-creation are yoked together. Pippin accepts as valid "Kant's original argument that the mind must actively bring its thoughts and intentions into unity, and so under a norm, for there to be 'my' thoughts and intentions." (I 408) Cognitive and practical life involves an "activity that is not the conceiving of a content, but an activity already engaged in the taking up of a manifold and so not checked by some externally received content." (I 150)

This "taking up" or "taking as" includes self-awareness of constructing the criteria for what should count cognitively or practically. This spontaneity is "logically and causally independent" (H 201) of any given sensations or desires.⁶ But affirming such a spontaneity "does not involve a commitment to some mysterious, secondary, *intentional* self-regarding." (H 45) Pippin accepts a strict reading of Kant's condition that the "I think" *could* accompany any presentation; there need not be any actual self-ascription. Affirming such spontaneity only "defines certain cognitive abilities as conditional on other cognitive abilities." (H 45) Instead of explicit self-awareness, "when S claims to know P, S must be implicitly understanding himself to be participating in the practice of judgment and justification . . . Such a reflexive awareness might simply always be implicit and *evinced only by what else S can and would do.*" (H 22f; my emphasis)

This spontaneity is predominantly social. "The key issue is whether representative success, or intelligibility in our dealings with the world, is something achieved by an individual subject's activity or processing." (I 376) It might seem that intelligibility is achieved by the subject's activity, since "some bit of matter cannot mean anything all by itself, but only as an element within some sense-making activity or practice or structure." (I 376n2) However, the central explainer of meaning will not be self or subject. Hegel shows this in the *Phenomenology's* "extensive attempt to expose the inadequacies of the very notion of a mind-world relation." These inadequacies point to the primordial historicized "subject-subject relation." (I 392) This relation is not a set of mutual performances by self-transparent subjects individually making meaning. But neither is it a network of given practices; it is something that subjects normatively judge and rationally accept. Though Pippin insists it can be quite implicit, this self-understanding is nevertheless a "dialectically interrelated, historically progressive, socially mediated activity." (H 202)

⁶ "Any representation of X involves, as a necessary condition, my taking myself to be representing X, and this condition cannot be the result of other representations if it is also a condition of *their* possibility." (H 46) "Neither the given content of experience nor some sequence of events in nature can be said to be responsible for our believing anything or acting in some way. We are responsible for what we take experience to constrain, and these constraints are rational, normative, not psychological or (in the modern sense of law-governed) natural." (I 11)

Would an implicit self-understanding be adequate to what Pippin is implying by saying "publicity and sociality without self-consciousness are blind; self-consciousness and purposiveness without sociality are empty"? (I 394) Or when he says that

The self-positing of apperception "carries with it" necessarily a recognition that experience *is being* construed or judged in a certain way; the positing occurs *qua positing*, rather than *qua* caused, or in some other way, unknown to the subject. And although I am certain that I am positing, I am not certain, just because I know I am responsible for such positing, that my positing "hits the mark." (H 51)

To know my self-activity well enough to have this lack of certainty--just how implicit can all this be? Can this ever be "evinced *only* by what else S can and would do"?

Also, Pippin defends a Tayloresque self-interpretation in the definition of action.

An action is the fulfillment of a contract, etc., only because the participants in the relevant institutions take themselves to be participating in institutions governed by certain rules, and view these rules as in some sense justifiable. . . . Were individuals to perform the same body movements without taking themselves to be following such norms, or if they took themselves to be conforming to other norms, the actions would not be those actions. (I 428)

But if behavioristic description does not identify the action being performed, then appeals to more behavior will not be enough. So "what else S can and would do" will never be enough to evince the "taking as" defining the action, unless the sphere of action predicates has already been established.

Pippin does not equate his rejection of behaviorism with an incorrigible first-person point of view.

[Individuals' self-interpretation of action] has nothing to do with what they individually believe, or the contents of their mental history. Such self-construals can be implicit, dispositional, revealed more in deeds than statements, and so forth. (I 428)

My sense is that Pippin's concessions to publicity in the identification of action and intentional content put him further down the slippery slope than he would like to be. What he says here seems headed for a dominant-third-person point of view where "taking themselves as doing x" is a theoretical interpretation of physical motions and behaviors that are underdetermined as to their action-relevant predicates. This would seem inconsistent with his demands for modern self-consciousness and self-legislation.

Pippin insists both that this spontaneity is something we do and know we do, and that it is not itself an identifiable event. One side comes out in his discussions of modernity as the self-awareness of our conceptual autonomy, and in his attacks on Nietzsche and Heidegger for ignoring the self-questioning and self-justifying in our allegiance to norms. On the other side, talking about Fichte's active ego Pippin insists that "there is no such original activity" (I 171), and he agrees with Kant on

"the non-isolatability of apperception as an event" (I 44) because "apperception cannot be said to be an experience at all, but a necessary component of any possible experience of objects." (I 43)

In what sense, then, is this spontaneity something that "we" do? To what extent is our historical subjectivity the product of this activity rather than its agent? Pippin would contend that it is both, since the current formation comes from our spontaneous reactions to the inadequacies of prior formations. But did this social process have its beginning in some determinate sphere of intentional meaning? Pippin rejects such a Heideggerian granting of meaning and its naturalistic equivalents. Or is there some pre-conceptual inhabitation we react to by spontaneously forming conceptual structures? Pippin rejects these in both their empiricist and postmodernist versions. Or is there a pure process that provides its own content by referring to its own form? Pippin rejects this strong Hegelian alternative. Or are we to split the subject into a pure activity and a constituted historical sociality? But this would replay Kant's dichotomy, deny the availability of modern freedom, and too much resemble what Pippin rejects in Habermas.⁷ So we are again left with questions about our self-assumption of our historical facticity as subjects.

Another issue concerning this spontaneous "taking as" is its ontological status. Pippin refuses to hypostasize our spontaneity, but he seems to vacillate about contemporary attempts to naturalize subjectivity.

Since Kant . . . a kind of Holy Grail for modern philosophy has been finding a way to argue that 'our natures' are not properly accounted for by 'subsumability to causal law' without basing such an argument on any metaphysical dualism . . . the new problem has always been coming up with the right way to state the insufficiency of such causal explanation. (I 12)

Pippin seems to vacillate on the relation of the spontaneous activity to deterministic causal systems. He says that he is arguing for "a generally non-metaphysical and non-empirical (non-psychological) account of human thinkings and judgments and intendings." (I 8) On the one hand:

If the formal conditions of knowledge require that the content of cognition be actively conceptualized in a way that is finally, at some stage, causally independent of the causally produced reception of that material, and of any initial causal-series processing of

⁷ Pippin contends that Habermas maintains an overly Kantian division of activity and passivity, so his procedures are too pure and his givenness too passive. "There is and can be no decisive or certifying appeal to any basic 'facts of the matter,' foundational experiences, logical forms, constitutive 'interests,' 'prejudices,' or guiding 'intuitions' to begin or end any such account." (I 163) "A Hegelian could not view the rationality of such substantive conclusions as only a matter of their being produced in a procedurally correct way." (I 181) But Habermas's account of the reproduction of the life-world and its openness to explicitation and questioning may be closer to Pippin's views.

that information, then *a thinker cannot really be a causal system*, whatever the system is made of. (I 31; my emphasis)

Again, he states that

If it turns out *that we really are causal systems* on the noumenal level, then the states, beliefs, and judgments produced by such systems would not be epistemic claims, even if the beliefs can be said to correspond to both phenomenal and noumenal reality. (I 53; my emphasis)

However, in his discussion of freedom and autonomy Pippin embraces compatibilism.

Some sort of notion of autonomy is the problem and compatibilism, or some sort of consistent whole . . . is the desideratum." (I 296)

The question of freedom in Hegel is not a question about what factor actually caused the action . . . but it is a question about the character and quality of the reasons that justify the action. . . . There are thus wide "degrees" of freedom in Hegel's roughly compatibilist theory. (I 428)

Pippin owes his readers an account of how he reconciles this approval of compatibilism with his claim that we are not causal systems.

Pippin could say that the freedom about which he is willing to be compatibilist is not the same activity as the cognitive self-activation that he claims cannot be a causal system. But this goes against his repeated claim that freedom is *the* issue of modernity and that cognitive and practical autonomy are tightly linked.

A second and more likely possibility is that Pippin has in mind something like Wilfrid Sellars's distinction between normative talk, which is essential to human identity but has no ontological commitments--so that, strictly speaking, intentional description is not the ascription of "real" properties at all⁸--and causal talk, which can explain every happening but provides on its own no normative or intentional determinacy. Knowledge claims and self-interpretations would then be events describable physically in terms of neural functioning, but also classifiable for practical purposes normatively in terms of meaning. If Pippin has this in mind, it twists a bit his claim that a thinker cannot really *be* a causal system.

Pippin does say, in a Sellarsian vein, that spontaneity is "not . . . a case of some distinct ('spiritual') fact

⁸ For Sellars, ordinary language ascription of intentional properties is a disguised normative classification about what role things play rather than a description of what they "are." Only a physicalist causal science can tell us about what exists and explain what happens. While an Aristotelian might argue that, broadly speaking, both formal and efficient causes tell us what something is, Sellars denies this because his theory of language as picturing and its necessary ontology redefine what the "form" of things can be.

of the matter escaping a certain discriminatory scheme." (I 13) But Pippin distances himself from Sellars's interpretation of Kant as a possible noumenal materialist (I 46), and even while he agrees with Sellars that concepts are definite through the inferential moves they legitimate, he also insists on pure categories that do not fit in Sellars' scheme (H 238). Also, Pippin reads Sellars as arguing that it is enough that the mind has the "relative spontaneity" of a set of dispositions or internal program that runs without depending on foreign causes for every operation, but he adds that "the problem of reconciling Kant's willingness to treat mental events causally, and his claims about spontaneity must still be faced. And Sellars's 'relative spontaneity' will not do." (I 46)

So we may be left with a third and more idealist account. This would be to say, as Pippin does, that "explanatory appeals to causal origins or functional correlations are themselves embedded in complex, historically specific theoretical projects, and so are unavailable as a straightforward explicans for the conceivings and justifications we sanction at one point or another." (I 168) But this still leaves unclarified the ontological status of those conceivings and justifications. If Pippin wants to refuse the question of their ontological status, and maintain a simple priority of normative self-taking to any ontological classification or description, then he should not be approving (or disapproving) of compatibilism.

Pippin agrees with Kant's primacy of pure practical reason.⁹ Indeed, Kant should have changed his practical philosophy and abandoned immediate determination by desire (I 53n40). We are always self-determining even when we think we are not. This implies that heteronomy is more a second-level ignorance about our true autonomy than it is a determination from outside. Pippin insists that people can be less than fully self-aware. Is, then, the distinction between following a norm and acting in accordance with a norm just a matter of being aware or not that one is setting up a norm? This would seem to flatten out much of Hegel's narrative of the development of the subject. The process would be in some ways more akin to Weber than Hegel: we were always spontaneously defining ourselves, but now we realize it.

⁹ Pippin to some extent defends Kantian morality against Hegel's attacks. He argues that Kant does not insist on the purism of duty that Hegel attacks in the *Phenomenology*. Kant does make room for regard for our happiness in his doctrines of self-perfection, imperfect duties, and our duty to be in civil society (I 80ff). Still, in the end Pippin agrees with Hegel that Kant cannot provide much content for social morality (I 91ff) and remains too legalistic (I 123). In his final essay, "Hegel's Ethical Rationalism," Pippin interprets Hegel's version of Kant's pure practical reason in terms of current debate between internalists and externalists in ethics. Hegel is read as a strong internalist. That is, similar to Korsgaard (I 433), Hegel insists that purely rational considerations can motivate action without being relativized in Humean fashion to contingent desires or empirical motives. But those purely rational considerations are not purely formal.

Kantian spontaneity also answers to a modern worry that stems most obviously from Rousseau: Even what we feel, what feels immediately and most closely our own, may not be genuinely our own, may itself be the product of the desires of others, or the derivative result of our own desire to be desired by others . . . nothing about such an immediate orientation ensures that such a goal is indeed mine, truly expresses "me." Only some assurance that I have freely determined to pursue such a goal . . . will allow me to count the goal as mine. (I 227)

How can I be reassured about my freedom? For Pippin there is no individualist answer to this question.

We cannot figure out what it is rational for anyone to do by pretending that life begins with relatively self-transparent, self-owning, determinate, adult, self-sufficient individuals. The ultimate Hegelian claim is that the problem of self-definition or identity is a problem of social power, not metaphysical truth, and that this process has a certain "logic" to it. (I 424)

If "it is only as such a social participant that I can be a free subject, truly self-determining, and thereby be able to recognize myself in my deeds and practices" (I 93), then there must be institutions within which our reasons can truly count as our own reasons. "We require others, such that the socially formative and educational institutions that make possible such recognition and its realization are effective." (I 109)

In this book Pippin does not go into detail about which modern institutions are the conditions of freedom, except to cite Hegel's trinity of family, civil society, and state, and to claim that certain institutional habits and structures must have been developed at earlier pre-modern stages. What Pippin does want to stress is that Hegel is not arguing that our institutions acquire their normative force just because they happen to be *ours*. "Hegel does not believe that individuals simply embody some sort of communal spirit." (I 108) Although Hegel has received increased press due to contemporary questionings of liberal individualism, Hegel's theory of modern *Sittlichkeit* is not a communitarian theory. Our allegiance to modern institutions is rationally necessitated; we have "good, in some cases overriding, reasons . . . for affirming what is required in a modern society." (I 449) Indeed, "Modern ethical life is *not just ours; it is rational*. It consists in practices and social attachments that make possible their own, rationally motivated and free affirmation." (I 449, my emphasis)

How can we know that our institutions are indeed truly rational, and not just forced on us by history?

There is no . . . external point of view, and so "we," ourselves inheritors and products of such self-transformations, must understand how such institutions and practices have come to assess themselves, what sort of reassurance they have achieved, how satisfying they have turned out to be, how they have led to "us." (I 336)

What kind of rationality is Pippin asserting here? He claims we cannot justify an institution, a

classification, or a rule by invoking higher order rules or classifications, and that there is no transcendental argument for a necessary set of rules. Rather we justify our practice by a historical account combined with the demonstration that the changes occurring in that history were rationally acceptable replacements for what was wrong with prior formations. The story of that process will reveal that the "basic failures are always due to the denial of . . . conceptual autonomy." (I 172)¹⁰

Because it guarantees the rationality of its institutions, modernity offers reconciliation with ourselves. In opposition to many critics, Pippin argues that this reconciliation has been positively achieved in modern society, though we pay the Hegelian price of permanent tensions within civil society and the loss of "home" in family and in nature.

So Pippin opposes Nietzsche and Heidegger when they attack the modern world. He claims that they do face the crucial question--the nature of that "original attachment" (I 353) that explains why we regard our lives (and our cognitive criteria and practical norms) as justified. But Nietzsche and Heidegger offer wrong solutions.

Pippin rejects readings that make Nietzsche into a contemporary postmodern deconstructor. Nietzsche's perspectivism does not "invite some playful shifting of perspectival points of view, as if one can, suitably enlightened, treat one's participation in some practice ironically, as a game of 'masks'." (I 356) Rather, Nietzsche is asking

his main, overarching, or master question . . . always the value of truth, or what we think "the truth" will accomplish, and more generally always the question of the various ways in which attachments to various possible lives come to be and are sustained. (I 321)

Of an opinion or a philosophy, Nietzsche asks not "is it true?" but "what do they want?" What sort of truths could do what Socrates hopes for, make life worth living (I 326)? Nietzsche's answer, in Pippin's reading, is that no truths can succeed at this task, which is fundamentally erotic rather than cognitive.¹¹

Nietzsche thus addresses Pippin's Hegelian question about how we justify and legitimate ourselves. He answers that attachments to ideals are not possible as results of reflection and deliberation, since

¹⁰ Pippin discusses Blumenberg's rival account of the genesis of modernity, but charges that Blumenberg is too focussed on cognitive scientific self-assertion (I 275). Pippin uses Nietzsche's discussion of tragedy to question Blumenberg's restriction of the theoretical attitude in his study of the mythos/logos opposition.

¹¹ Pippin rejects the usual readings of Nietzsche's early truth and lies essay as reducing truth to metaphor, which he judges "bad philosophy not an alternative to philosophy." What Nietzsche is really attacking are potentially redemptive or life-justifying truths, not all truths (I 324f).

any mode of reflection already evinces some ideal or other. For Pippin, Nietzsche's answer depends on a "basic, somewhat crude contrast between 'self-assertion' and the 'weakness' of social dependence." (I 346) Contrary to this, Pippin insists on the necessity of a self-relation that is "never wholly active . . . given the simple possibility of self-deceit one is always self-reactive." (I 348)¹² But if we consider the doctrine of eternal return, and Nietzsche's discussion of the constitution of the subject in the play of forces, Nietzsche too is hardly affirming pure self-activity.

Pippin indicates some of the complexities of "activity" in Nietzsche when he insightfully suggests that Nietzsche approaches Hegelian mutual recognition:

[the noble man] desires his enemy for himself, as his mark of distinction; he can endure no other enemy than one in whom there is nothing to despise and very much to honor. . . . [This] comes very close to associating the possibility of the master's self-esteem, his distinction, with the issue Nietzsche worries so much about in modernity, with "recognition" by the other. (I 346-7)

Another Hegelian move is Nietzsche's reliance on historical accounts, since he sees that "the modernity crisis, nihilism, is a wholly historical crisis." (I 343)

There is no possible answer, or wager about, the issue of what sort of way of life could attract allegiance now, unless we are able to put together some story of what fell apart and why. . . . "What might be possible now" depends essentially on what we take to have happened, on ability to produce a "history" that will show us where we are and what might be appealed to now if we are to continue to "live." (I 370f)

Pippin thinks that we can do better than Nietzsche's historical account. The Rousseau-Kant-Hegel tradition of self-legislation offers a deeper story of the coming of modern social existence.

As for Heidegger, his account of modernity leaves us simply accepting given practices. Pippin argues against Heidegger's claim that Hegel is a Cartesian. In doing so, he develops his own explanation of why Heidegger himself is not a Cartesian, and shows how close Heidegger and Hegel are on this issue. Both deny that "the possibility of any cognitive or even intelligible relation to the world resides in mental episodes occurring in individual minds" or that meaning is a result "of the occurrence of such subjective states, or of some subject's . . . activities." (I 375) Both make reference to our immersion in the network of social practices. But Heidegger's anti-Cartesianism ends in an acceptance of given practices. Heidegger is "blind to the way such practices are at issue for participants and genuinely intelligible only if the way they are at issue is understood by an interpreter." (I 394)

Dasein is its disclosedness, Heidegger tells us; it does not work toward disclosure by reasoning, reflecting, contestations with others. These all already evince some original disclosive event. . . . Acting for the sake of its own possibility cannot rightly be

¹² Whether this is completely consistent with what Pippin says elsewhere about pure self-activity would need further discussion. This is another return of the question of facticity.

understood as acting on, or "having" reasons, as if it came to have its ends or could see them as its own, only by virtue of such reasons. . . . what is it then to *be* one's disclosure, or to wait or think or attend or dwell in some way not tied to "having come to think that one should think or dwell, etc.," is, I think, *the* Heideggerean problem (ultimately unresolved) at least after *Being and Time*. (I 403n15)

For Pippin, in contrast, "the norms that direct our cognitive and practical activities do so only if collectively authorized in some way, sanctioned, rationally legitimated . . . this collectively self-sanctioning process is necessarily developmental, that is, purposive." (I 389) For us moderns, the "way we go on" includes "distance . . . from the norm, my not merely responding and initiating appropriately, but in the light of, and so with some possible alteration or rejection of, such presumed shared sense of appropriateness." (I 387) We accept norms as rationally appropriate. While it is true that we need to be already inserted in a social nexus for that self-reflection to be possible, that nexus itself is rationally reviewed through a retrospective story of its coming about in which we see the rationality of the process.

While Heidegger affirms many kinds of distancing within our temporal existence, Pippin is right that Heidegger's views about our resolute acceptance of facticity are opposed to his own that norms are critically self-legislated. However, given Pippin's theory of the institutional mediation of our spontaneity, Pippin comes closer than he might like to Hegel's view that the average citizen does not need to know the *philosophical* rationality of each and every norm.

Pippin sees the fundamental disagreement between Hegel and Heidegger as concerning non-being, or "how and why things don't make sense, are not, are indeterminate, or how the possibility of making sense and some failure of sense are related." (I 378) In Heidegger, negation leads to the indeterminate abyss and the hope of a new granting of being. In Hegel, however, failure or negation is always internal to a practice and so a determinate negation (I 390).

Insufficiency or breakdown . . . is possible only if the practice "fails" when measured against some end or point implicitly (or explicitly) posited by it. It could not be experienced as a failure if it were measured against some incommensurable, alien practice or standard. But if this is so, then the failure or negation must always be determinate, insufficient with respect to X or Y, or because of A or B. (I 393)

This is a very perceptive analysis, though there will be more to say about determinate negation. The attack on Heidegger, however, needs to consider the difference between Heidegger's account of the contextual failure of a tool such as a hammer, and the quite different general alienation from context resulting from boredom or anxiety. Only experiences of the second type lead to the abyss of groundless *Ereignis*, but they are not failures of a practice. The fact that nothing at all has gone wrong with any practices is what makes such experiences so terrifying to Kierkegaard and Heidegger. Conflating the two types of experience attributes the wrong kind of unity to the Heideggerian

world.¹³

In his essays on Heidegger and his animadversions about recent French thinkers, Pippin does to postmodernists what he thinks others do to Hegel. That is, he reads them as regressions rather than as sharing in the post-Kantian presuppositions. They all appeal to extraconceptual given foundations. They overlook our rational self-conscious social process of concept and norm creation. Their positions lead to Wittgenstein, who stands where Pippin thinks Heidegger and "the left Heideggereans" must end up, with a positivism of forms of life and language games that are all right without being normatively accepted or judged. This positive given framework of values and norms disallows normative judgment on itself because it supposedly makes normative judgment possible.

Against such views Pippin insists that there is no escape from the space of reasons, since any response to current frameworks must be understood within that space and cannot be a comment from outside about the space of reasons as such. There can only be an active self-insertion into the process of the expansion of the space of reasons, a self-knowing spontaneity that produces norms rationally on the basis of history.¹⁴

But the best postmodern writers do not try to escape the space of reasons or to ground it in some outside determination. They try to find ways to discuss, "from inside," the structure of the space of reasons, its pluralities, and its changes. Hegel did that too, and Pippin is striving to do the same. Heidegger and Derrida and Deleuze, for instance, disagree with Hegel (and with each other) over the nature of self-referential discourse and self-involved process (especially its possible purity), and over the kinds of structures and motions in the becoming of the space of reasons. Postmodern aversion to "rationality" stems from such issues rather than from a wholesale reversion to pre-critical givens. Pippin is right that this involves the status of negation and temporality in the process of the becoming of form.

¹³ Any theory that equates the Heideggerian world with a set of social practices misses (or deliberately denies) Heidegger's insistence on the event character of our original possibilities, possibilities which, since they can be "retrieved" in new ways, go beyond what is currently set out in social practices. This already functioning excess of possibility in Heidegger keeps him from being a pragmatist who talks about our reforming given practices. For Heidegger, our creativity remains tied to what has been granted, which is, however, more than any explicit determination. His deconstructive descendants are very ambivalent about this aspect of Heidegger --Derrida, for instance, cannot afford to have *différance* become a purely formal condition-- Pippin rejects it out of hand.

¹⁴ While this sounds much like Habermas, see note 7 for Pippin's worries about Habermas's views of historical rationality.

Pippin's interpretation of Hegel is of major importance to readers of this journal.¹⁵ Pippin is right, in my judgment, in seeking a non-metaphysical reading, but I worry that his Hegel stays too much on a meta-level and downplays the details of the logic and the later system. One casualty is the strong notion of determinate negation. This does not make Pippin's views automatically suspect on their own; he is developing Hegel's ideas in new ways, as Hegel did with Kant. But it is worth asking about the accuracy of his picture of Hegel, and whether this picture supports Pippin's claims for a rational self-legitimation of thought. For this background we turn more to his Hegel book than to this collection of essays.

Pippin says that "for Hegel, the issue of the 'determinations of any possible object' (the classical Aristotelian category issue) has been critically transformed into the issue of the 'determinations of any object of a possibly self-conscious judgment'." (H 250) This could be seen as an Hegelian Kantianism that itself stays on a relatively formal meta-level. Pippin does deal with the specific content of historical transitions, but he either remains quite formal (any transition always stems from a failure to recognize our spontaneity) or he provides an account whose "rationality" may not be strong enough for his own program.¹⁶

Our conceptual spontaneity is key to Pippin's discussion of Hegel's logic:

For there to be any possible judgment about objects, there must be possible an original determinacy, a pure discrimination presupposed prior to any empirical or specific

¹⁵ Pippin often relates his readings of Hegel to those of Henrich (see, for example, H 305n4), Rosen (H 304n1), (H 307n18), Theunissen (H 305n7), and Hartmann (H 177ff).

¹⁶ Pippin does not want to be seen as a pragmatist, since his demands for self-legislation go far beyond pragmatic acceptance of contingent givens. His view "looks like . . . an explicit, full-blown, anti-realism, pragmatism. . . . [but] it will soon turn out that *which* desires a subject determines to pursue, which ends to satisfy, and indeed what counts as true satisfaction . . . are results of the collective, historical social subject's self-determination and have no independent, natural status." (H 148f) Again, Pippin makes an effective comment against a Quinean rebuild-the-ship-as-we-travel-along pragmatism. "This comforting Neurathean image is, however, highly misleading (as misleading as Heidegger's famous image of being simply 'thrown' into the world). It assumes that we have some sense of where we are headed, or, if we do, whether that destination is preferable to any other, and that we should simply give up once and for all contestations about who is steering and under what authority or how work on the ship should be organized. Once such issues are raised and properly formulated, as they must be, just 'going on as we do' will, I expect, seem an indefensibly smug response." (I 25) This implies considerably more explicit shared public self-consciousness about normative deliberations than seems to be granted at some other parts of Pippin's discussion. Also, is this as far as Pippin thinks from Dewey's self-correcting rational pragmatism and its goal of freedom?

judgmental discrimination. Minimally, this means that any such object of judgment . . . must be qualitatively determined . . . [But] qualitative-quantitative determination[s] radically underdetermine the possibility of a concrete object of judgment unless the reflective distinction between essence and appearance is invoked, a distinction that itself cannot be effective unless essence is understood as the 'law'-governed relations among 'appearances.' All of this leads to Hegel's basic claim that the originally required qualitative determinacy itself ultimately depends on . . . subjectively projected theories, in particular causal theories, some level of which is a function of 'spontaneous thought itself,' presumably at a very abstract level of generality." (H 241f)¹⁷

There are, then, several processes going on; (1) the spontaneous process of subjectively projecting successive theories at a very abstract level of generality, (2) empirical concept formation under the normative guidance of these pure categorial schemes,¹⁸ (3) the reconstructive process of the logic that traces the nature of the first two processes. The dialectic, with its necessity and determinate negation, describes the third process, not the other two. That is, the *Logic* and the *Phenomenology* provide the ascent to the meta-level where we can see the necessary dependence of process (2) on process (1), and the way in which process (3) completes both.

Pippin rejects Hegel's larger system as making claims that cannot be maintained about necessity and determinate negation.

It is unlikely that so much, from the exhaustion of Greek tragedy, to the paradoxes of Roman law on property, to Leibniz's failed monadology, can be linked to a developing self-consciousness about the very possibility of "positions" or "theories" or philosophy. The most one can say (and it is still a great deal) is that such an account can often be right and helpful about the failures of human consensus, about unjustifiable, "dogmatic" appeals to the external authorities of religion or objective expertise, and so forth, and that Hegel can powerfully motivate his own position on such a possibility by accounting for the problems encountered when his own position on such autonomy is implicitly or explicitly denied. (I 173)

In place of the grand narrative, Pippin's Hegel "promises a kind of unending contestation about any fixed points or settled results, a modernity necessarily unending and unsettled." (I 414) The instability of Notional determinations is a permanent feature revealed by the logic (H 247, 252). Using the

¹⁷ "The grand Hegelian syllogism is thus: What there is in truth, a possible object of a cognitive judgment, can be such a possible object only if distinguishable according to the interrelated logic of being and essence. The determinations of being and essence are themselves possible only as the result of the Notion's self-determination. Therefore what there is, a possible object of judgment, is itself a (Notional) result of such self-determination." (H 306n14)

¹⁸ Some of the things Pippin says suggest that causal theories ought to be on level (2) while others suggest that they should be on level (1). How "pure" can a causal theory be?

language of the discussion of reflection in the logic of essence, Pippin says that "truly determinate reflection is not a resolution of the opposition between positing and external reflection, but a continuation of such a constantly unstable reflective enterprise in a suitably self-conscious (and so, in a speculative sense, satisfied) way." (H 257) The logic provides "an absolute comprehension of the nature of the incompleteness of thought's determination of itself, of the necessity for reflectively determined Notions, and yet the instability and ultimate inadequacy of those Notions." (H 257)

Pippin's Hegel makes no metaphysical or empirical claims. "I also do not believe that there is finally such a thing as speculative logic." (H 272n51) Discussion of these matters has already filled many books, but a few impertinently short remarks may be of some use. Is Pippin working within dualities that Hegel (and some postmodernists) might want to question? He says, for instance, that Hegel gives us "an absolute or final account of what it is to know, and not a knowledge of a divine Absolute." (H 247) [But this is a too Kantian duality between a self-justification of knowledge and a foundational singular being. Might not these alternatives require mediation that would reduce Pippin's abrupt choice of total subjectivity or total objectivity? The movement of the third part of Hegel's Logic, which develops a final self-inclusive category or meaning of being, may be more than the movement of subjectivity.](#)¹⁹

Similarly, Pippin stays with the duality of object- and meta-level; for instance, he complains about Pinkard and White making a "slip from formal to material modes of expression." (H 298n27) In keeping with this duality, he sees the first and second parts of the *Logic* as showing the inadequacies of immediate and essential predication, and the third part as a self-awareness of the pure activity that founds such immediate and essential predications. The third book offers a self-reflection on the process, and does not itself provide descriptions of the world. But this dismisses too quickly (as systematic overambition) the ways in which Hegel applies the categories of the first two books (in the *Philosophy of Nature* and the *Philosophy of Spirit*), and how some of the categories of the third book (particularly the doctrines of judgment and syllogism) are applied "ontologically" as more adequate descriptions of, for example, social processes in the *Philosophy of Right*.

Although Pippin assigns Hegel's logic to the meta-level, he does want to talk about the historical

¹⁹ For a concise debate about one version of the categorial interpretation, and of the relation of the *Logic* and the *Phenomenology* to one another and to the later system, see the 1990 exchange between Pippin and Pinkard, who both agree in rejecting a strong reading of determinate negation, but disagree on the basis of argument and the kind of possibility Hegel is studying. (Terry Pinkard, "How Kantian was Hegel?" *Review of Metaphysics* 43 (June 1990): 831-838; Robert Pippin, "Hegel and Category Theory," *Review of Metaphysics* 43 (June 1990): 839-848) For a sketch of my own incipient categorial reading, see Chapters 3-5 of *The Critique of Pure Modernity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986).

sequence of theories and practical norms. The spontaneous pure Notions have appeared replacing one another in history, and the *rationality* of those historical transitions is crucial for distinguishing Pippin's theory from assorted contemporary antirealisms and pragmatisms. What establishes that rationality? The key is taken, broadly speaking, from the *Phenomenology*.

Hegel is trying to replace the Kantian reliance on pure intuition with a self-grounding conception of thought. Throughout, I have taken that to refer to a reliance on the concrete negation of *prior* attempts at "pure syntheses." (H 225)

[Such a negation] involves, first, an account of why, in what sense, such a Notion would have appeared or would have been "experienced" as adequate to Spirit at some time or other (given that there is no other ground for such adequacy) and why, in what sense, it would come to be experienced as inadequate. Both of these components must ultimately involve reference to a variety of practices, institutions, and "self-understandings" not traditionally included in epistemological or critical theory." (H 107)

[In those past attempts] the source of the illusory nature of various categorial determinations is an inadequate self-consciousness about the self-determining teleology of thought itself, the attempt to understand such categories realistically or "positively," either as metaphysical predicates or as judgmental functions of a "posited" or "given" transcendental subject. (H 303n24)²⁰

The question is just how "rational" these transitions can be. Given Pippin's account of determinate negation, might his "rationality" be something more like "appropriateness"?

Pippin's account of determinate negation emphasizes that the failure of a practice is not a general alienation but is due to specific factors.

Any scheme makes possible or constitutes the objects for which it accounts. So its limitations are internal not external; making use of the scheme, as a sort of practice, reaches a point where it fails to satisfy the original purposes for which it was deployed, rather than fails to "match up" to something. (I 13)

Given these failures it may be appropriate to try to create a new historical shape. But such a failure is not yet the necessity Hegel apparently attributes to determinate negation in the Introduction to the *Phenomenology*, where the internal failure of one shape *is* the arising of a new shape. No transition involving rational deliberation in terms of purpose happens for the consciousness undergoing the transition. Pippin's implicit self-transparent rationality has all the promise--and all the difficulties--of the relation of the natural consciousness and the "we" in the *Phenomenology*.

²⁰ "A putative Notional account of objects is insufficient, fails in some determinate way to be a Notion of objects, *because*, for that Notion to be the Notion it is, certain presuppositions about Notionality itself would have to be made that cannot finally be made within the presupposed limitations of that original Notion" (H 249)

Pippin rejects stronger readings of determinate negation: "at most, what such a transition can do is motivate the introduction of this topic and then defend it against competitors." (H 300n2) Pippin's own view is that the most Hegel can achieve is a version of the argument to the best explanation: "Hegel appears to think that this answer must demonstrate a strict necessity in actual historical development. . . . All he really needs is an account of the way his view . . . does explain the conceptual problems inherent in the various positions he analyzes, a claim that his account is a *better* explanation . . . and a challenge to any potential competitor." (H 292n2) Is this enough for "the self-legitimation of reason"?²¹ (H 78)

Hegel asserts that "the positive answer just *is* the realization of such determinate insufficiency." (H 216f) But this could only be true if there were "some grand disjunctive syllogism" that contained all possible continuations of the series. Also, Pippin restates the long-standing objection that the strong reading of determinate negation illegitimately presupposes its goal.²²

To claim that the insufficiency of some position or other results not in the mere insufficiency of that position, but is already a determinate indication of its successor, presumes that such an insufficiency can be identified and confirmed only if there is some standard of complete sufficiency implicit in some determinate Notion, all such that "experiencing" or "logically determining" the failure to meet that standard can tell us much more determinately what it is . . . and more determinately about how to meet it, given this particular failure. . . . But that answers the question of *rational* adequacy, and

²¹ Pippin's remarks about necessity in the historical process need to be harmonized with statements such as "Instead of the restricted Kantian sense of necessity, 'necessarily true of any possible world we could sensibly experience,' Hegel's revision of Kant's account of sensible intuition means that his 'qualifier' for necessity is 'necessarily true of any possible world that a self-conscious judger could determine'." (H 250) Pippin also at times alludes to a notion of possibility that is not specified by any particular scheme. Given his notions about pure categorial spontaneity Pippin may not be justified in using "possible" in the following quotation: "it is certainly *possible* . . . that the world can be such that particulars can be qualitatively limited only by an infinite contrast with all other particulars, and so simply cannot be determinately comprehended by us." (H 255; my emphasis)

²² This objection is familiar from Heidegger, but Pippin's formulation owes more to Henrich. It is worth noting that while Pippin neatly shows how Heidegger's attack on Hegel as a super-Cartesian misses the mark, he comes close to restating Heidegger's claim (in *Identity and Difference* and "Hegel and the Greeks") that Hegel works within a given metaphysical meaning of being and knowledge. One way of seeing how the postmodernists get misread by Pippin would be to investigate the ways in which a meaning of being, for Heidegger or Derrida, would be neither a self-transparent category nor an extraconceptual given foundation. The key would be found, if it *can* be found, in the theory of temporality.

not just *adequacy with respect to some alternative or other*, only if there is some way of understanding such continuous transformations in Notions that can defend the claim of *development . . . of the "higher" resolutions . . . and this can all occur only if there is some direction to this development, some terminus ad quem.* (H 236)

Pippin opposes any reading of Hegel that sees the goal as revealed at the end of a necessary process which made no prior reference to that goal. On the other hand, Pippin's own Hegel does rely on an explicit goal: "the telos is a kind of full self-consciousness about the conditions of one's claim to know . . . a critical rejection of the possibility of empirical immediacy." (H 305n2) This is the ultimate purpose that enables us to judge inadequate shapes and Notions. Are we, then, closer to a pragmatism of instrumental reason than Pippin intends us to be? It is true that the ultimate purpose is not a natural drive or need, but segregating the pure telos of full self-consciousness may appeal to those very dualities of intellect versus sense that Pippin--along with Dewey, Heidegger, and many postmodernists--wants to question.

Pippin is right, in my opinion, to argue that Hegel's claims about determinate negation are not sustained by Hegel's practice. The question then becomes whether as pure an enterprise as Pippin wants can be disengaged from Hegel's philosophy. This returns us again to issues about the relations of subjectivity and facticity.²³

This collection of essays is both wide-ranging in the thinkers treated and focused in the themes brought to bear on those thinkers. The essays on Kant are perhaps its most significant, together with the final essay on Hegel's ethical rationalism. The discussions of Nietzsche and Strauss offer striking insights and position the issues in new ways. The Heidegger essays pose intriguing questions but may be limited by trying to fit Heidegger into categories Heidegger works hard to avoid.

Besides their interest as interpretations of significant thinkers, Pippin's ideas are important on their own as a trenchant theory of modernity as self-legislating subjectivity. I have tried to question some of his arguments and interpretations, but I hope that my recounting of Pippin's opinions has made clear

²³ In keeping with his overriding purpose of pure self-consciousness, Pippin sees the *Phenomenology* as dealing from the beginning with the problem of "transcendental skepticism"--Kant's gap between possible objects of experience and things in themselves. Pippin's treatment of the various gaps discussed in Hegel's Introduction (between the certainty and truth of a shape of consciousness, between the object for consciousness and the object in itself posited by the shape of consciousness) takes these as the problem to be overcome, whereas they could be taken as Hegel's tools to be applied to a natural consciousness that as immediate feels no skeptical challenge (H 102f, 110f). The vindication of science when it appears as one shape among many is not necessarily a skeptical problem.

the value of his forceful approach to important issues. I share his ambition of accounting for what it means to live freely as self-consciously historical moderns. In addition, we should all take heart from the way Pippin defends philosophy and the importance of rational argument against both those he takes as postmodern skeptics and those who attempt to base modern institutions on consequentialist reasoning from common sense values.

"Less pain and suffering," "more individual freedom" "more and more diversity," and so on: all are manifestly philosophical claims about the most defensible aspirations of modern European civilization and, I think, should be defended as such. Doing so inevitably involves one in the systematic problems tackled with such enthusiasm in the Idealist tradition: the notions of nature, agency, sociality, religion, death, finitude, art, and so forth, which must be made coherently compatible with any such aspiration. (I 3n3)

These concepts and their problems do not go away. Pippin's books and essays offer insights, questions, and a defense of modernity that are all worth attention and concern.