

Review: Book Reviews

Reviewed Work(s): Hegel's Practical Philosophy: Rational Agency as Ethical Life by Robert Pippin,

Review by: Christopher Yeomans

Source: *Ethics*, Vol. 119, No. 4 (July 2009), pp. 783-787

Published by: The University of Chicago Press

Stable URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1086/605300>

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Pippin, Robert. *Hegel's Practical Philosophy: Rational Agency as Ethical Life*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009. Pp. 320. \$29.99 (cloth).

Robert Pippin's new book is symphonic in scale and ambition, bringing together a wide variety of themes from Hegel's practical philosophy to present a quite radical picture of Hegel's understanding of the free life in modern society. The result is an intriguing conception of subjectivity as expression, freedom as identification, and rationality as participation in modern social and political institutions: to be free is to express oneself through actions with which one can rationally identify, and to have a reason to act just is to participate in modern institutions. Although much of the material has been published previously, and the book takes up themes that were present in Pippin's many earlier writings on Hegel, the book substantially advances that work by the proximity and progression with which the issues are considered.

The Hegel we find in Pippin's book is centrally concerned with the importance of mutual recognition, which is treated systematically within the distinctively Hegelian concept of spirit (*Geist*) understood in a way congenial to Robert Brandom's suggestion that any determinate mental content (and thus subjectivity itself) requires a mutual exchange in which speakers and thinkers hold each other accountable for the consequences of what they say and do. This normative and nonmetaphysical account of spirit and subjectivity as an achievement rather than as a matter of fact is at the heart of Pippin's systematic reconstruction of Hegel's view. One can see Pippin's view as a middle path between the recent nonsystematic interpretations of Hegel's practical philosophy by Axel Honneth, Allen Wood, and Frederick Neuhouser and the traditional metaphysical systematic interpretations of Michael Theunissen, Charles Taylor, and, more recently, Robert Wallace.

There is far too much of philosophical interest in the book to be discussed in a review, but four themes stand out as of central importance: a conception of free agency as a kind of nonmetaphysical compatibilism focused on the role of self-legislation, the retrospective and noncausal account of agency that results, the identification of rational agency with participation in modern social institutions, and the historicist account of the justification of those institutions and the rights and duties that they embody.

Pippin emphasizes the unique approach taken by Hegel to freedom of the will in describing his view as a relational state theory: to be free involves (a) being in a reflective or deliberative self-relation requiring (b) participation in certain practices (and thus relations to others) which are always contextual to specific historical social and political structures (4). One of the central projects of the book is to present this unique approach as a real response to perennial concerns about free agency. The first attempt to do this is by placing Hegel's views against traditional options in the philosophy of action motivated by the mind-body problem. On Pippin's reconstruction, Hegel is neither what he calls a "voluntarist" or agent-causation theorist, nor a traditional compatibilist, and for essentially the same reason: Hegel flatly denies that causation is applicable at the level of spirit or human agency because agents interrupt the causal process. At first it seems that such a claim would suffice to establish Hegel as a libertarian (even if not of the agent-causation variety), but Pippin holds that Hegel's view

is more like compatibilism in its understanding of the relationship between mind (spirit or *Geist*) and body or nature. Although causation is in some sense inapplicable, the relevant distinction between causal nature and free spirit is non-dualistic and nonmetaphysical, since the distinction is based on the historical fact that natural beings have developed to a point at which “the form of their reflexive self-relation is an aspect of what is to be represented, not a separable, quasi-observational position and they come to be able to hold each other to account on bases other than natural need” (46). So agents never cease to be natural beings, but they have a kind of active self-relation such that they “take up” rather than merely exist in their relation to the natural world (51–52).

As a result of this reconceptualization of the nature of mind and will, Pippin claims that Hegel simply had no interest in the ontological questions about free will that occupied his modern predecessors. Instead of defending the possibility of free will by demonstrating the reality of an immaterial substance or the limitation of causation to appearances in space and time, Hegel will instead tell a historical, developmental story about how we came to hold each other responsible as agents, where that historical account can only be told from within the peculiarly modern form of the practice of reason-requesting and reason-giving. Thus, we cannot understand spirit by reflection on its substantial nature, but only by living it out as a practice.

At this point, a natural worry would be that Hegel has somehow changed the question. Pippin’s response comes in chapter 3 with the extension to Hegel’s conception of freedom of the Kantian notion of self-legislation. As the compatibilist is wont to say, we are misled by the problem of alternate possibilities when what is really important to freedom is self-legislation. Thus, the true opposition is not between the liberty of indifference and natural necessity but rather between autonomy and coercion or external authority. The central thrust of Hegel’s position is to make sense of a notion of self-legislation that avoids the apparent necessity of an existentialist first stage where the self is not bound by norms and then subsequently binds itself. In motivating Hegel’s position, Pippin argues that Kant cannot provide such a reading of self-legislation from the vantage point of pure reason. Instead, historical context must be invoked to fill out that perspective, and the only justification for that context will be in terms of an account of the failures of previous forms.

But the particular historical context of Hegel’s reflections is the failure of modern philosophy’s attempts to make sense of objectivity in terms of having a representation of an externally given object, and Kant’s reworking of this problem so that it becomes the question of our right to use certain norms. This means that in looking for a justification for our ascription of freedom to ourselves or for the validity of practical norms, “we will not be searching about in the metaphysical or empirical world for the existent truth-makers of such claims. We will instead be looking for the source of what can only be a self-legislated and self-imposed normative constraint” (109). The true freedom that characterizes mind or spirit as opposed to nature is just this autonomy of the normative domain, and as a result determinism is not a worry because no scientific discovery is relevant in the face of that autonomy.

Self-determination is then to be understood as normative self-regulation, which Pippin holds to be superior to the self-causing language of Kant and

Fichte in not suggesting a pre-causal state and instead “regarding spirit as always already ‘self-realizing’ in time” (133). The result of this view is a conception of free will that is centered on retrospective justification and mutual recognition rather than deliberation and the exercise of causal powers. This shift in perspective involves an acceptance of moral luck (since the meaning of what I do is no longer exclusively up to me) and has two further consequences. First, Pippin’s Hegel wants to extend the temporality of the action in both directions: prior to the resolving subject to include the social context of the action, and subsequent to include the reception and interpretation of what was done. Second, the concept of weakness of will is rejected, since on Pippin’s view this requires a kind of ability to do otherwise that leads to guilt when I do not carry out what I thought my intention was. The better account, Pippin argues, is that I found out through my action that I am not who I thought I was, but without the delusion that I could have been someone different.

Pippin points out that when Hegel introduces the element of indeterminacy in his theory of the will, he immediately cautions against reifying it as a distinct capacity abstracted away from the context of evaluation and motivation. The freedom of the will is determined not by alternate possibilities but rather by the quality of the evaluation of the action. This then generates the need for a standard of evaluation, and it is here that Hegel’s historicism suggests participation in the institutions of modern social life as this standard, as opposed to both the Kantian categorical imperative and empiricist concerns for well being.

Here Pippin does a good job of motivating this answer to the question of why we should think of modern ethical life as constituting a form of freedom. Pippin argues that once we give up the causal perspective on agency, with its insistence on intentions as mental events that exist as prior causes, we must be open to this alternate view in which collective norms articulate the nature of freedom. Once we do this, first-person reports are no longer incorrigible, and social interpretation aimed at mutual recognition replaces isolated individual deliberation in determining the quality of the reasoning expressed in the agent’s action and thus the degree of freedom to be ascribed to the agent.

Pippin presents the theory most concisely as follows: “I can be said to be freely writing this book, its production would be really mine, even if I am in various ways responding to external contingencies and influences not of my own making, if the sense or significance of those influences is a feature of . . . general institutional and social practices which are themselves capable of being understood by me as practices and institutions ‘without which I could not be me’” (137). Free action is rational action, and participation in the practices of ethical life just is having the good reasons that allow something to count as mine. On Pippin’s view, Hegel’s analyses of failures of such participation in prior historical episodes show that some social arrangements are unable to produce agreement about what ought to be done and therefore undermine the practical reason of their participants. The solution is not the individual discovery of a truth maker but rather the collective production of social arrangements that do allow agreement on normative matters. Rather than saying that one has reasons to participate in social arrangements, Hegel’s position is that only by participating in social arrangements does one have reasons.

Thus, Pippin argues that there is no account of practical reason to be given

for why we ought to participate in modern social institutions; rather, all practical reasoning is just such participation. But in order to avoid historical relativism, Hegel must say what kind of self- and other-relation qualifies as full freedom and that is realized in modern institutions. Given his claims to the autonomy of the normative, he must find an account of this ideal relation that does not depend on nature, but he has already rejected the Kantian and utilitarian approaches to norms. So although he is clear that the free will's dependence on mutual recognition forms the possibility of the achievement of collective independence, it is not clear what the ideal is that constitutes the norm by which we are inevitably bound in the first place. But once we accept this antidualism about spirit and his self-legislation theory, Pippin argues, the only possible candidate for this basic ideal or fundamental norm is just "being recognized as, responded to as, an agent" (199), and this norm itself can receive its justification only through a critically historical account rather than through practical reasoning. Thus, there is a fundamental distinction between philosophical and everyday moral reasoning, and the former is in fact irrelevant to the latter. Everyday practical reasoning bottoms out quickly in reference to modern institutions and the rights and duties they involve, but those institutions receive a philosophical justification through a critical historical account.

Let me close with two observations. First, although both the retrospective element and the deemphasis of individual deliberation strike me as deep insights of Hegel's account, this cannot be the whole story of free will. Without a causal element, we are missing half of the feedback loop that connects past and future actions, and claiming that my actions are *products* of my own will seems like a pun. In principle, it looks like the agent could be in the position not of the novelist whose reflections on prior chapters influence how she writes the next chapter but rather of the musician who has a constantly running random note generator from which he selects certain sequences of notes as aesthetically significant while rejecting others, but without these evaluations playing any role in what the generator produces next. This is to suggest that Pippin's Hegel has the same problem with which noncausal libertarian views are often confronted, namely, that they cannot give any account of the agent's control over her action; understanding alone is not sufficient. And given both the distinction between agency and nature on Pippin's account, and Hegel's skepticism about the prospects for effective democratic political participation, the prospects for agential control over either natural or social external influences seem quite dim. So I worry that Pippin's Hegel, rather than avoiding the distinction between libertarianism and compatibilism, has in fact managed to take on the shortcomings of both: libertarianism's miracle of causal exemption and consequent problems with control, and compatibilism's thin view of freedom according to which I am free even though my character is a product of external forces over which I have no control.

Second, it strikes me that given the exponential growth in the influence and sophistication of philosophical naturalism since Hegel's time and its impact on the contemporary philosophy of action, a Hegelian advocate of free will on Pippin's interpretation is in a similar situation to critical theorists of trying to make a dialectical historical argument without the social movement or obvious historical development to serve as the objective foundation. Thankfully, Pippin

does not wallow in Adornian melancholy. His arguments for the autonomy of the normative and his diagnosis of a nonspeculative form of argument in large swaths of Hegel's texts sometimes suggest a Habermasian transcendental response to this dilemma, but at least officially he rejects this option. Pippin is well aware of the possibility of this kind of difficulty, but I am not quite sure how he plans to proceed in the face of it.

Despite these concerns, it is no small feat to have presented the breadth of Hegel's practical philosophy as Pippin has. In particular, the systematicity with which he sets out the extensive network of decisions faced by any interpreter of Hegel's practical philosophy ensures that the book will be the starting point for a great deal of future work on the topic.

CHRISTOPHER YEOMANS
Purdue University

Rosenblum, Nancy L. *On the Side of the Angels: An Appreciation of Parties and Partisanship*.

Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2008. Pp. 588. \$29.95 (cloth).

Political theorists have scorned political parties as objects of study. In this important and pathbreaking book, Nancy L. Rosenblum undertakes to explain why this has been so and to argue for why it should be otherwise. The first two parts of her study are historical. Tracing antiparty arguments from early modern political thought through the Progressive Era to today, Rosenblum shows that two predominant strands of contemporary democratic theory—"good civil society" theory and deliberative democracy—inherently inherit an antipathy to political parties from the progressives' faith in voluntarism and from their idealization of impartiality, respectively. This historical analysis effectively provides a new genealogy for these strands of democratic theory, one that calls their efficacy for democratic politics into question. In the third and final part of the book, Rosenblum makes her case for partisanship as "the political identity of representative democracy" (7). She defends partisanship as unique among political identities for its enthusiastic embrace of pluralism and for the "severe self-discipline" it requires of partisans: they must sustain a commitment to the party, articulate its message to the public as a whole, and yet never "imagine that their party could speak *for* the whole" (7, 364; emphasis added). This small but crucial distinction between speaking to the whole and speaking for the whole is the essential connection between partisanship and representative democracy and marks what Rosenblum terms the "categorical moral distinctiveness of party ID" (364). Partisans understand themselves as parts in a "system of regulated rivalry" where they need not overcome or obliterate their adversaries because majority status is always temporary and minority status never "irreversible" (363).

Rosenblum launches her defense of political parties from an astute claim that some readers will find startling: that political parties do not simply reflect existing divisions, conflicts, and demands but that "creating the content" of those conflicts, "drawing the lines of division, is the achievement of parties and partisans" (21). Breaking with "orthodox standards of representativeness,