

# the review of metaphysics

a philosophical quarterly

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Author(s): Terry Pinkard

Source: *The Review of Metaphysics*, Vol. 43, No. 4 (Jun., 1990), pp. 831-838

Published by: Philosophy Education Society Inc.

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20128947>

Accessed: 13-11-2016 14:07 UTC

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HOW KANTIAN WAS HEGEL?

TERRY PINKARD

IT IS A TRUISM THAT HEGEL took much of his program from Kant, but it has always been a matter of great dispute as to just what he took, how much he took, and how much he altered and added to the Kantian program. Since Kant is currently at a high point in acceptance in Anglo-American philosophical circles, a fresh look at Hegel's adoption and criticisms of that program will perhaps not only shed new light on Hegel but also point the way to a new integration of Hegelian themes in contemporary thought. In *Hegel's Idealism: The Satisfactions of Self-Consciousness*, Robert Pippin goes a long way to doing just that. Pippin provides a balanced philosophical account of Hegel and his program by arguing, among other things, that Hegel's work should be understood as a transformation of the Kantian idea of deriving all the conditions of knowledge from the transcendental unity of apperception, a special kind of self-conscious awareness of objects.<sup>1</sup> The results are impressive.

In elaborating Hegel's system, Pippin ascribes two Kantian theses to Hegel, which I shall call the "Apperception Thesis" and the "Transcendental Thesis." On Pippin's view, Hegel's program should be broadly construed in something like the following way: Hegel carries forward the Kantian program of constructing the categories without which we could have no conceptual scheme at all

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<sup>1</sup> Robert Pippin, *Hegel's Idealism: The Satisfactions of Self-Consciousness* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988). Unless otherwise noted, page references in the text are to this book. One caveat to the reader: Pippin's book is an extraordinarily rich reading of Hegel, both in his use of historical material and textual reconstruction as well as in his general philosophical argument. As in all short exchanges, I am focusing on some very general features of the book at the expense of the richness of its detail.

(the Transcendental Thesis), and, like Kant, he locates the principle of that reconstruction in the conditions of self-conscious awareness of objects (the Apperception Thesis).<sup>2</sup> Hegel departs from Kant in rejecting the dependence of thought on intuition, and in adding a social, intersubjective dimension to the categories. (Pippin defends this in a particularly good section on Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*.) Hegelian absolute idealism thus finally ends up being more like contemporary antirealism than like the subjective idealism of Kant's philosophy.

This forms Pippin's ambitious attempt to make sense of one of the most problematic aspects of Hegel scholarship: the relation of the *Phenomenology of Spirit* to the rest of the system. This is more than of merely parochial interest to Hegel scholars; it is important for anyone who wants to make a reasoned judgment on the value of the Hegelian program. The problem is that Hegel said many different things about the *Phenomenology* in his various works, and it remains unclear where it fits in his thought. On one reading, it is the presupposition of the rest of his system, and the whole system stands or falls with the success of the *Phenomenology*. On another reading, it is just a youthful work that he later mostly abandoned, reworking nonetheless a small part of it into the mature system.

Pippin might seem to be on his strongest ground in his interpretation of the *Phenomenology* in terms of the Apperception Thesis. There he offers an intriguing account of how Hegel transformed the Kantian idea of rationality into a more social account and how he substituted a developing historical subject for the abstract Kantian transcendental unity of the I. However, the attempt to impose the Apperception Thesis on the *Logic*—indeed, on the mature system as

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<sup>2</sup> Pippin takes this apperceptive principle to be that “consciousness can be said to be in relation to an object only in the sense that it takes itself to be” in such a relation (p. 114). This means: “For anything to count as a representation of mine, I must be self-consciously representing such an object, implicitly taking myself to be representing thusly” (p. 132). In Hegel's transformation, however, Pippin argues that the Kantian claims about the apperceptive conditions of self-consciousness become transmuted into the claim that “participating in a practice can count as such only if the practice is undertaken . . . within . . . the ‘horizon’ of assumptions taken by the participants to be those assumptions” (p. 152). Thus, the self-relation, or apperception, necessary for a determinate cognitive relation to objects is possible only under certain types of intersubjectivity (p. 158). Kantian rationality thus becomes *socially* construed.

a whole—is more strained than it is when applied purely to the *Phenomenology*. Why? The apperceptive principle is most clearly at home where Kant had it, namely, in discussing our conscious awareness of objects.<sup>3</sup> Where Pippin's interpretation strains is on the point of whether the principles appropriate for the philosophy of *consciousness* (with its inherent opposition of subject and object) are appropriate for the consideration of dialectical *thought*, in which such an opposition is supposed to be overcome. This is a crucial difference. Consciousness may be reflexively *aware* of itself, but thought *subsumes* and *refers to* itself; the former concerns the structure of our psychology, whereas the latter is more “logical” in nature.

Pippin's use of the Apperception Thesis ultimately must fail to explain Hegel's systematic goals. Perhaps it explains why the *Phenomenology* would precede the *Logic*, but it is difficult to see why Hegel's system would require a *Logic* at all (much less the *Encyclopaedia* system that follows the *Logic*). Most importantly, its failure to capture the Hegelian distinction of consciousness and thought also fails to capture the sense in which Hegel saw his system as being that in which “substance” becomes “subject.” I would take this to be something like the following. The *Logic* begins with the categories in which we articulate the conceptions of individuals as differentiated from each other with respect to their quantitative and qualitative features (the “Doctrine of Being”). It gives way to a logic of substructural explanation of superstructural appearance (the “Doctrine of Essence”). This ends in an account of a world of substances interacting causally with each other, the whole system of which is the world-substance. Now, while this causal system could perhaps be said to be self-explanatory (*causa sui*, as Spinoza described it), it could never be self-subsuming. Self-subsumption

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<sup>3</sup> The *Phenomenology* concerns *appearing* (*erscheinende*) knowledge, that is, the knowledge involved in the opposition between our consciousness and the objects of which it is aware. The purpose of the *Phenomenology* is to delineate and order the possible forms that such an opposition of consciousness can take. After it has run through all the possible forms, the *Phenomenology* depicts a consciousness that reaches the stage at which it has no relation to an object at all. A consciousness without a relation to an object, however, is no longer consciousness at all but *thought* thinking about itself. Since this thought is self-mediating (it has no object to mediate it), it is therefore “absolute” and is thus ready to begin the *Logic*. Pippin takes the view that the *Logic* nonetheless presupposes the *Phenomenology*. I take issue with this later in this paper.

is a logical relation among concepts. Thus, we must go beyond "Substance" to the categories of conceptual, inferential thought, that is, "Subject." Logic thus culminates in the conception of self-subsuming, self-explanatory thought, namely, the Idea.

It was this move that Hegel thought Kant had implicitly made but had mistakenly restricted to forms of consciousness.<sup>4</sup> The systematic conclusions he drew are the following. Although the *Logic* concludes with an account of thought's self-reflexivity, it does not tell us how this "thought" is connected to *human* minds. For that, a Philosophy of the Real (*Realphilosophie*) is required, which culminates in a conception of Absolute Spirit, that is, the human mind collectively reflecting on itself through the historical practices of art, religion, and philosophy. *Spirit* is the self-reflection of *human* minds, just as *Idea* is the self-reflection of *thought*. Where does the *Phenomenology* fit into this picture? It turns out to be the study of how *we*, determinate historical individuals and communities, have reached the cultural stage at which we understand ourselves as Spirit (communal subjectivity) and how *we* (determinate historical individuals) are now culturally ready for pure thought (the *Logic*). The *Phenomenology* is thus a study of how we have arrived historically at the stage at which we are ready to begin the systematic reflection that culminates first in Idea, then later in Absolute Spirit. Thus, not only is apperception not the key to Hegel's system, but seeing it as such will blind us to the systematic features that for Hegel were so important.

I have even deeper misgivings about Pippin's Transcendental Thesis. By seeing Hegel's program in terms of the Transcendental Thesis, Pippin forces Hegel's idealist dialectic into two claims that

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<sup>4</sup> In Hegelian eyes, Kant's theory of the mind should be divided into two parts. First, there is the theory of "the" mind, in which it gets divided into a faculty of intuition and concept. Second, there is the theory as to how "the" mind is realized in *human* minds, namely, as our forms of sensibility and our forms of understanding. If you drop the condition of intuition as a requirement of "the" mind (retaining it perhaps as a condition for human minds), then one gets something like the Hegelian *Logic*. In Hegel's view of a proper appreciation of Kant's achievement, we should understand that although *our* minds may be sensibility and understanding, "the" mind is only concept. The relevant Kantian text in this regard is Kant's celebrated footnote to §16 (B134n.) of the "Transcendental Deduction": "The synthetic unity of apperception is therefore that highest point, to which we must ascribe all employment of the understanding, even the whole of logic, and conformably therewith, transcendental philosophy."

cannot, by Pippin's own admission, live up to what Hegel has to say about it. First, Hegel's claims to finality in the *Science of Logic* depend either on there being some kind of rigorous logical procedure called determinate negation (which is implausible, p. 255), or, just as bad, they depend on a prior and implicit assumption about thought's final self-understanding. Second, too many of Hegel's so-called concepts required as *a priori* constraints on any possible conceptual scheme are too specific and too contingent to be plausible constraints (p. 258). Pippin cites categories such as "elective affinity" as examples of categories that are too specific to function as such *a priori* constraints. These concepts "cannot possibly be considered categorial results of thought's pure self-determination . . ." (p. 258). Since Hegel's dialectic cannot live up to these transcendental claims, it must be considered a failure.

This transcendentalized Hegel is fortunately not the only Hegel available. An alternative is to see Hegel's dialectic as an explanation of the rational possibility of certain categories. The assumption is that contradictory sets of categories are impossible (after all, the real is the rational), and one explains how a category is possible if one explains how both it and its apparently contradictory "other" are each compatible. Taken in that way, Hegel need not claim therefore that without the notions of "elective affinity" or "force" or the "mathematical infinite," we cannot have thought of the world. Of course we can. What we cannot have is *that set* of categories, along with *consistent, coherent* thought of the world. For example, Hegel thought that he could show that if one began, as Parmenides did, with the notion of Being itself, one could show that one could not have consistent thought unless one also supplemented that simple idea with a number of other categories. In that way, the set of categories found in the *Logic* can claim to be more than just one among many alternative sets. By beginning with the minimal presuppositions of a Parmenidean concept of Being and showing how the problems with it generate further categories, Hegel thought he could thereby also claim a kind of priority for his categories that had eluded other philosophers. This sees the Kantian legacy for Hegel, as does Pippin's reading, in the transcendental deduction of the categories, but it sees its importance not as a philosophy of the conditions of self-consciousness but of self-reflexive and self-subsuming *thought*. Hegel continues Kant's categorial program via similar means.

In this light, we should also distinguish something's being a *transcendental* condition of apperceptive self-consciousness from something's being a condition of the way in which a particular *type* of self-consciousness is structured. In the mature system (and, indeed, in many sections of the *Phenomenology*), Hegel's use of "self-consciousness" often seems to be more akin to ordinary notions of self-understanding than it is to Kantian notions of apperception. Thus, in Hegelian dialectic, there may be conditions for a certain type of self-consciousness to be attained that are not themselves conditions of self-consciousness in general but categorial conditions of *that* self-consciousness. This seems in fact to be the way in which the various categories of, for example, art and religion function (what Hegel calls Absolute Spirit): they structure the self-consciousness of an age, but they are not transcendental conditions of apperceptive self-consciousness in any Kantian sense. As we might put it, in those sections, Hegel is not concerned with the transcendental conditions of apperceptive self-consciousness *per se* (with the aspects of any conceptual scheme in general), but with the ways in which various types of self-consciousness (as self-understandings) may be coherent or consistent and with the ways in which the more or less logical problems they engender give rise to new solutions found in new forms of self-consciousness. (It should also be noted that this apperceptive reading will also make Hegel's extensive categorial treatment of natural science difficult to understand, as Pippin is aware [p. 263, note 20]. The treatment of the categories of natural science, however, are not a problem for the Hegelian theory interpreted as the explanation of possibility. New *a priori* categories in the natural sciences are introduced in a similar fashion to the way they are in the whole system.)

Now, Pippin might reply that this is all well and good, but without the Transcendental Thesis, Hegel is left completely open to Kierkegaard's devastating charge that the *Logic* was just an elaborate game of thought with no application to the real world. Even more strangely, it would make Hegel the theorist of rational possibility into the precursor of contemporary possible world theorists. For some, that would no doubt be sufficient grounds to banish Hegel to Twin Earth and be done with him forever.

Much more needs to be said about this than can be done here, for it goes to the core of both Hegel's and Kant's projects. Indeed, it touches on many contemporary debates about realism, antirealism,

and internal realism (the latter only being the idealism that dare not speak its name). The first part of Hegel's answer, I think, lies in his thesis that "the real is the rational, and the rational is the real." We can put that thesis like this: if something is a requirement of rational thought, then it is a requirement of things in themselves; moreover, there is nothing that is in principle not knowable by rational thought (there can be no categories of the real that we are incapable of understanding, no mysteries that lie in principle beyond our cognitive grasp). On my view, Hegelian dialectic may not give us the transcendental conditions of knowledge, but it can tell us what in our thought is consistent and coherent. The program of providing a self-subsuming, self-reflexive explanation of the rational possibility of the categories shows that the realist skeptical alternative (that the categories do not apply to things-in-themselves) is deficient as an explanation of those categories.

The second part of Hegel's answer lies in his understanding of the rational criticism of these different forms of self-understanding in history, in that he argues that one can demonstrate that one is superior to another. Hegel's claims for his theory's being "absolute" (as being complete, consistent, self-subsuming, and self-reflexive) can perhaps be reconciled with its historically determinate character in the following way: the theory is complete in that it leaves out none of the relevant historically given categories; it is consistent in that no new contradictions appear *in it* to propel further moves in the dialectic; its basic principle (dialectical thought) is self-subsuming and self-explanatory; but it may not be final in that new categories can arise in history that recast the present set and present new problems of possibility. Discussing this fully, alas, would take another paper just on its own.<sup>5</sup>

Both Pippin and I agree that Hegel's thought is best understood in terms of its carrying out the program of the Kantian transcendental deduction of the categories. We also both agree that Hegel thought that in his system (1) each new category was necessary to avoid a contradiction, and (2) it was the *only* such category that could be posited. We both agree that a close reading of Hegel's texts leads one to the conclusion that, Hegel to the contrary, neither

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<sup>5</sup> I offer an account of how this ties into Hegel's theses about the teleology of history in chapter 8 of *Hegel's Dialectic: The Explanation of Possibility* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1988).



(1) nor (2) is true. We disagree on where to go from there. I would argue that by reading Hegel in terms of the Transcendental Thesis, Pippin dooms Hegel from the outset, since Hegel quite clearly failed to show the conditions of any conceptual scheme at all. However, on the alternative view, we can endorse the idea of speculative dialectic as a method while nonetheless foregoing Hegel's necessitarian claims for it. We are then left with the task of constructing categorical claims simply in terms of how well they do their explanatory job. Likewise, I would argue that by reading all of Hegel's system in terms of the Apperception Thesis, Pippin loses the crucial distinction in the mature system between the principles of consciousness and the principles of thought. However, on the alternative view, we can still see Hegel in terms of a very modified version of the Apperception Thesis—we can always see how the principles of thought are reflected in the consciousness of a period—and thus have our rich *and* nonmetaphysical Hegel without being subject to Pippin's criticisms of him as a transcendental theorist. We thus end up with a chastened and more Socratic Hegel who is nonetheless still recognizable as Hegel. Hegel the chastened dialectical idealist and theorist of self-consciousness remains intact. Even Hegel's celebrated historicism and his "philosophical history" can remain relatively undamaged.

Both Pippin and I locate Hegel in a direct line from Kant. We agree where the line begins (in §16 of the "Transcendental Deduction"), but we disagree as to how the line is drawn, and consequently we would disagree, I think, about where the line ends up. Pippin's Apperception Thesis may still, perhaps, be maintained—albeit in a modified form—but why he would want to maintain the Transcendental Thesis is beyond me. After all, the Transcendental Thesis makes Hegel so clearly wrong, and that is not Pippin's aim in his far-ranging study of Hegel's idealism.

*Georgetown University*