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Hegel in Contemporary Political Philosophy

Thinking immediately involves freedom.[1]

Introduction

After the demise of a Kantian/Rawlsian political philosophy of secular rights and duties, many are turning to Hegel as offering a model of post-secular political philosophy able to include substantive social practices and even robust religious life. Many recent political readings of Hegel have opted for a non-metaphysical interpretation, even while affirming the logical basis of Hegel's thought.[2] While these political appropriations are all a form of left Hegelianism in emphasizing political reform in the name of the freedom of thought, these interpretations have been anything but uniform.

   The contemporary return to Hegel is dominated by two seemingly opposed expressions: one in the form of social self-legislating practices resulting in inter-subjective recognition, the other in the form of radical subjectivity persisting within the failure of the social reconciliation. The former focuses on the *evolution of social normativity*, and the latter on the *revolution of radical subjectivity*. The "normative Hegel" is best represented in the work of Robert Pippin; the "radical Hegel" by Slavoj Žižek. Interpreting the work of these two will orient us within the landscape of contemporary Hegelian studies and prepare for entrance into Hegel's philosophical system.

Pippin and Žižek, however, can only be properly understood as part of a general movement to overturn metaphysical interpretations of Hegel, of which Charles Taylor is an excellent example. For many, Taylor's *Hegel* effectively reintroduced Hegel to American philosophy in 1975, and does so through a metaphysical reading of Hegel's system. Taylor sees Hegel uniting the two diverse Enlightenment strands of radical moral autonomy and Romantic expressive unity.[3] To do this Hegel must overcome the oppositions between the "knowing subject and his world, between nature and freedom, between individual and society, and between finite and infinite spirit."[4] Not relying on a philosophical pantheism that makes humanity an insignificant part within the cosmic substance, Hegel modified Spinoza and Schelling so that subjectivity stands alongside cosmic substance.

This unity of subject and substance is achieved through *Geist*, often translated as spirit or mind. Taylor understands *Geist* through Hegel's account of the human subject.[5] The human subject for Hegel is both a living being (animal) and a thinking/expressive being (rational), and as such is necessarily embodied in a double sense. As an animal, the human body has a form of life and therefore a natural limit. As a thinking and expressive being, humanity always creates tangible modes of expressing its thoughts, constituting the second form of its embodiment. Consciousness, therefore, is always both continuous and discontinuous with its embodied way of life, separating thought from desire, reason from nature, and intention from inclination. This consciousness divides humanity from itself resulting in the unfortunate, even if expected, articulation in Cartesian dualism. Within this embodied alienation "man is thus inescapably at odds with himself."[6] Or in a more Hegelian idiom, "the subject is both identical with and opposed to his embodiment" because thinking cannot exist without embodiment even while it struggles against this embodiment.[7]

In Taylor's reading, rather than persisting in the non-coincidence of life and expression for the human subject, *Geist* unites the embodiment of life and expression because the universe is already the embodiment of *Geist*. But for *Geist* to fully express itself in the universe as free and rational, there must exist a consciousness in the universe as an external embodiment (or expression) of the self-determining rational freedom of *Geist*. This embodied expression of *Geist* is finite spirit, or human subjectivity. Human individuals are not merely fragments of the universe, parts within a cosmic whole, but are "vehicles of cosmic spirit."[8]

While everything in the universe is an expression of *Geist* expressing itself, humanity is the culminating vehicle of this expression, especially when humanity comes to know itself as rationally free.

For Hegel, on Taylor's reading, the differences between nature and freedom, individual and society, finite and infinite, each express moments of the original unity of *Geist* now externally embodied, returning toward its own unity as self-conscious freedom. This is the basis for Hegel's claim for being an idealist, that the "Idea becomes its other, and then returns into self-consciousness in *Geist*."[9] Taylor's interpretation of cosmic *Geist* working through human self-consciousness as the expression of *Geist's* own essence constitutes a strong version of the metaphysical reading of Hegel. It is this interpretation that Pippin and Žižek seek to overturn in their own return to Hegel.[10]

In their reactions against the metaphysical reading of Hegel proposed by Taylor and others, Pippin and Žižek exemplify two currents in political appropriations of Hegel. The first section of this chapter will examine Robert Pippin's reading of Hegel focusing on *normative* autonomy established through social practices. The second will look at Slavoj Žižek's interpretation of Hegel as articulating *radical* autonomy beyond such social practices. These opposed interpretations will serve to introduce the main themes of Hegel's philosophy while also beginning to show the inherent instability caused by Hegel's philosophy of self-transcending immanence. This instability will lead us into the next chapter on *Science of Logic* and *Phenomenology* and the striving for freedom found in those texts.

Evolutionary Social Practices: Autonomy *through* Sociality

Pippin seeks to offer a third way between the right Hegelians, who postulate a "philosophically problematic theological metaphysics," and the left Hegelians, who run to the margins of Hegel's texts looking only for useful formulations and interesting conclusions.[11] Pippin presents Hegel as a non-metaphysical, yet still speculative, thinker. This "absolute idealism" does not revert back to a pre-critical cosmic mind, i.e. the human subjectivity writ large for Taylor. Rather, Hegel's project is to complete Kant's critical philosophy. The focus in this section will be on Pippin's reading of Hegel's practical philosophy as an

extension of Kant's critical project. For Pippin, Hegel reinterprets Kantian freedom as social self-legislation, historically achieved through practices and institutions, resulting in mutual recognition as intersubjective institutional relatedness.

Kantian self-legislation

The problem of freedom within modernity often comes down to attempts to reconcile the individual and society. To understand Hegel's contribution to this problem, Pippin first directs us to understand how Kant adopts the problem of self-legislation from Rousseau. Rousseau sought to reconcile the original independence of natural humanity with the dependence of social humanity, or more dramatically, to reconcile the fact that "man is born free, and everywhere he is in chains."[12] The natural savage, who at one time lived *within* himself, now lives *outside* himself, in society, mistaking this exteriority for freedom.[13] Rousseau does not opt for a mere return to a natural setting, but poses the problem of how to achieve independence through societal dependence. This is not the search for a relatively unconstrained freedom of non-interference as one seeks to secure our needs or desires (along the lines of Hobbes to Nozick). Rather, freedom is a reconciliation of our particular wills and the general good of society, expressed as the "general will." Only in this general will can one achieve freedom as independence without denying the fact of social dependency. Indeed, the ideal society would be structured to mediate economic and psychological dependence in order for personal independence to flourish. Only in this society would it make sense that one could be "forced to be freed."[14]

Kant takes from Rousseau the desire for freedom as more than non-interference, but rather than basing it on a vague conception of the "general will," Kant produces an argument from reason expressed as the categorical imperative. The basis of moral action is to "act only according to that maxim whereby you can, at the same time, will that it should become a universal law."[15] This universal law, or norm as Pippin prefers, is not imposed externally, but rather is self-legislated by reason. Respecting others as an end, rather than a means, is to posit humanity itself as an ultimate value or norm to be followed. This norm is not something other than the capacity to set and evaluate

norms according to reason, such that the categorical imperative is a self-legislated law, not externally imposed by nature or force, but internally posited by reason.[16] This positing by reason, for Kant, is a process of individual reflective endorsement where each applies the standards of reason to one's own actions. For Kant, this reflective endorsement solves Rousseau's problem of the general will because self-legislating reason is not something more than individual reason as will. The cost, however, of Kantian self-legislation as an individual reason's own reflective endorsement is that morality is separated from politics, causing a separation between individual and society. It is here, with the success of Kantian self-legislation but the failure of social reconciliation, that Pippin sees Hegel moving the argument forward.

Spirit as socio-historical achievement

Remembering that the "Kantian notion of self-legislation is the center of everything" for Hegel,[17] we can now examine Pippin's understanding of Hegel's neo-Kantian political theory, beginning with his understanding of *Geist*. Often rendered by the "almost meaningless and now standard translation" of "spirit," regularly mis-understood as a cosmic mind or soul, Pippin understands *Geist* as the "state of norm-governed individual and collective mindedness … and institutionally embodied recognitive relations."[18] Pippin's understand-ing of *Geist* draws from a "distinct and controversial interpretation" of Hegel's *Encyclopedia* and its linking of nature and *Geist* as non-dualistic, as self-relating, and as the achievement of freedom.[19]

For Pippin, *Geist* is neither material nor immaterial because it is not a thing at all. Rather *Geist* is Hegel's way of expressing a non-dualistic relation between nature and mind. *Geist* is not divine mind manifest-ing itself in nature, but rather the truth of nature in which nature vanishes [*verschwunden*] (PSS 1:24–25), and yet still not other than nature.[20] The truth and vanishing of nature in *Geist* indicates the inap-propriateness of purely natural causality as an explanation for the complexity of certain natural organisms who "come to be occupied with themselves and eventually to understand themselves no longer appropriately explicable within the boundaries of nature."[21] The divide between nature and *Geist* is therefore not an ontological one, but an explanatory or a normative one, such that humanity has established for

itself that, while it is part of nature, it is inappropriate to reduce human achievements and aspirations to merely natural phenomena.[22]

Because it is non-reducible to natural, *Geist* must be understood as self-relating. For Hegel, sentient creatures do not merely embody their natures, but employ a mediated and self-directed stance toward their natures. The reflected, self-conscious stance of humanity is really the source of the nature–*Geist* distinction as humanity seeks to render intelligible its natural embodiment and its reflective achievements.[23] *Geist* is self-relating because it knows itself as *Geist* in its distinction from, and yet dependence on, nature. In this way *Geist* comes to know itself when it makes the normative distinction between itself and nature, becoming self-relational in the process. But it must be remembered that this overcoming or vanishing of nature is not based in an alternative ontological entity acting upon nature. Rather, while not reducible to nature, the achieved distinction of self-relating *Geist* is best considered as "not non-natural."[24]

All of this is a way of saying *Geist* is best understood as an achieved freedom from, but in, nature. This independence from nature is a capacity historically achieved, not naturally given or cosmically received. According to Pippin, Hegel sees the human mindedness of *Geist* as

> something like achievements, modes of self- and other-relation and so ways of making sense of, taking a stance with regard to, nature and one's own nature that can be reached, or not, and these are of course achievements actually reached by nothing other than creatures otherwise describable as bits of matter in space and time.[25]

Geist, therefore, is freedom from nature, while remaining within it, such that self-actualization is not some cosmic mind expressing itself through nature and history. *Geist* is rather "a kind of socio-historical achievement (the achievement of certain practices and institutions) which some natural beings are capable of" such that there is a "continuity between natural and spiritual dimensions."[26] *Geist* is the capacity for freedom of thought and action that is a practical and historical achievement, an achievement not requiring an ontological distinction between nature and spirit.[27] As Pippin says,

> Spirit, understood this way (that is, by taking full account of the anti-dualism claim and the insistence that development is a self-determining

development) is thus not the emergence of a non-natural substance, but reflects only the growing capacity of still naturally situated beings in achieving more and more successfully a form of normative and genuinely autonomous like-mindedness.[28]

This achievement as self-relating freedom connects to the Kantian concerns of self-legislation, but is now socially constituted as a historically achieved norm, rather than an individually, reflectively endorsed norm. That *Geist* is a product of itself, relating to itself, mirrors Kant's concern that one gives oneself one's own law.

Geist, as the socially normative sphere of "not non-natural" human existence, represents Pippin's articulation of self-transcending immanence. *Geist* is immanent to natural processes but self-transcends them through its own normative self-relation. Human sociality as historical achievement is the form of Hegelian self-transcending immanence for Pippin. But as we will see, Hegel's concept of *Geist* is meant to extend beyond merely a socio-historical achievement into an account of mutual recognition ending in autonomy as social self-legislation.

Mutual recognition as condition for freedom

The last step, then, in Pippin's interpretation of Hegel's practical philosophy centers on an understanding of mutual recognition, the fact of which establishes and ensures freedom. The language of achievement used by Pippin throughout marks Hegel's account of human nature as neither essentialist nor teleological. Because of this need for achievement individuals are neither liberal autonomous agents nor communitarian instances of society, as this would lapse into essentialist or teleological renderings of humanity. Neither the individual nor society can become the sole basis for deducing the other, but rather the individual and society are both considered as rational achievements occurring together. Pippin claims that positing such a gradualist account of achieved social norms must eventually be able to account for its own understanding of itself.[29] How is this accomplished?

Hegel's account of the struggle for recognition attempts to fill out this process of achieved social norms. Against the widely accepted Marxist interpretation that chapter iv of Hegel's *Phenomenology of*

Spirit offers a struggle for recognition as the formation of individual subjectivity, Pippin argues this section, and the entire work, offers an account of the conditions of social freedom. For Pippin, the question of freedom, not the question of subjectivity, guides Hegel's discussion such that the struggle is not an individual, psychological struggle for recognition, but rather a struggle for the adequate conditions for asserting and realizing freedom. When the positions of master and slave emerge after a struggle to the death (the master, who would forsake life to assert freedom, and the slave not willing to forsake life for freedom), the problem that emerges for Hegel is not the psychological dispositions or motivations of each. Rather the problem is the objective failure of each to have achieved the goal of freedom. The master fails because he is now seeking recognition from one who is unworthy to grant it, and the slave fails because he recognizes the Lord but is not recognized in return. In Pippin's paraphrasing of the situation,

> The dilemma is that the objective social situation is such that neither can find any way of dealing with each other in normative terms; no exchange of justificatory reasons is possible in such a context, and so the very determination of what was done remains provisional and indeterminate … [because] each is striving to be free under conditions that will not allow the realization of freedom.[30]

Hegel traces this breakdown of mutual recognition through the social organization of labor, and then through general figures of consciousness attempting to justify or legitimate this inequality: the figures of Stoicism, Skepticism, and the Unhappy Consciousness. These failed attempts at securing freedom reveal the need not only for a socio-pragmatic and historical account of freedom, but also an institutional account of mutual recognition. Pippin outlines this institutional account as consisting of (1) a free subject being recognized as such by (2) another such subject in (3) a concrete practice of mutual recognition (4) achieved as successful norms of mutual justification.[31] This mutual recognition as mutual justification means to treat others *and* oneself as reason-givers and reason-responders within a normative social framework.[32]

Pippin notes that for Hegel this recognition is always institutional, but not institutional in the strict sense in which Hegel delineates as

the family, civil society, and the state.[33] For Pippin, in an admittedly deflationary move,[34] institutional recognition is the claim that we are always already giving and receiving practical reasons within a context, from a social-institutional position, where the rules governing social interaction are already established. Pippin points toward the discursive nature of giving and receiving reasons for one's actions within context; i.e. one always argues from the position of being a parent in regard to a child, a property owner in regard to one's possessions, a business person in regard to fulfilling a contract, and a citizen in regard to taxation. Hegel's point is that these are already viable institutional positions from which one gives and receives reasons, not requiring a higher discourse for justification.

Because all institutions are revisable, breaking down and changing, Pippin claims that Hegel should not be read as a cultural positivist.[35] These fundamental changes occur in institutions not because an agent has *done* something different, but rather because what can be *justified* as reasonable by that agent becomes different. For Pippin, "requesting, providing, accepting, or rejecting practical reasons … are all better viewed as elements in a rule-governed social practice" where justifications for actions are offered to others.[36] When a crisis arrives within these practices there can be no recourse to a meta-discourse to resolve the issues (i.e. Kant's categorical imperative) because one can never exit these discursive institutions. In the process of justifying one's actions one must always accept an opponent's claim as a move within their own space of reasons, only then countering by offering and attempting to convince them of your alternative understanding of the issues. Pippin points to the development of equal rights for women as an instance of this institutional revision and transformation.[37] For Pippin, Hegel's view on practical reason is that

> Human subjects are, and are wholly and essentially, always already under way historically and socially, and even in their attempts to reason about what anyone, any time ought to do, they do so from an institutional position.[38]

Or we could say, these institutional positions are the evolving normative frameworks in which *Geist* produces itself, relating to itself as self-legislating freedom. In this interpretation, Hegel is not relying on a monistic substance or cosmic mind to ground institutional necessity,

but understands *Geist* as social self-actualization, achieved through shared justificatory practices of giving and receiving reasons for one's actions, and recognizing oneself in those actions and justifications, as well as through the actions of others.

In summary, then, Pippin suggests a Hegel having much in common with strains of American pragmatism and its understanding of social normativity and rationality.[39] Pippin's Hegel has much to say to the problems of contemporary practical philosophy in regard to how we understand the development of historical and social practices, and how we communally justify our actions to each other, and therefore achieve recognition, without adopting an atomistic individualism.[40] In these ways Pippin navigates between a Kantian liberal atomism of individual self-actualization before the moral law and a communitarianism that speaks of social dependence yet offers no real explanation for how this might function as freedom. For Pippin, Hegel is an advocate of evolutionary social practice promoting a rational freedom such that authentic autonomy is achieved through sociality. These evolutionary social practices are the life of *Geist*, the self-transcending achievement beyond, yet within, the immanence of nature.

Pippin's reading of Hegel, however, is self-consciously a reconstruction of the emergence of justificatory social practices of recognition as an achievement. His account never attempts to explain how a present justificatory practice is actually challenged, and equally as important, by whom.[41] But it should be asked, given Pippin's account, where does an Antigone come from who challenges Creon? Where does a Socrates come from who becomes a gadfly within Athens? Where does a Jesus come from who would challenge both Jewish exclusivism and Roman domination? And where is this subjectivity constituted, in order to challenge the social practices that have evolved in each shape of *Geist*? Pippin's Hegel offers no resources for such a subjectivity because for him the question of a "beyond," an outside of each shape of *Geist*, is already outside the orbit of Hegel's philosophy. As we will see at the end of Chapter 3, Pippin, like Hegel, feels no compulsion to offer an account of a radical subjectivity ready and able to break from social norms precisely because there is no need to

break from them. There is no need to break from them because, for Pippin and his Hegel, the modern project and its institutions best reflect the normative achievements of human freedom.

Revolutionary Radical Act: Autonomy *against* Sociality

Slavoj Žižek does not agree with such a positive assessment of modern institutions nor with this normative account of Hegel. Žižek agrees that Hegel disallows reference to an ontological beyond, but this denial is meant to mobilize a radical subjectivity beyond social normativity. He accomplishes this by offering a Hegel radically open to the slippages within reality (ontologically and socially). Žižek's Hegel, driven by a dialectics of failure rather than one of progressive reconciliation, offers a political subjectivity capable of escaping the dominant social order, able to break with the normative status quo. Indeed, this radical subjectivity is meant to engage in revolutionary acts against the normative social order.

Kantian completion

Žižek constantly seeks to correct the cartoon version of Hegelian dialectics commonly understood as "the self-mediation of the Notion which externalizes itself, posits its content in its independence and actuality, and then internalizes it, [and] recognizes itself in it."[42] In agreement with Pippin, Žižek understands Hegel not as a dialectical panlogicist for whom all reality is merely the drama of cosmic mind.

Žižek argues that Hegel does not regress from the Kantian critical insight, falling back into a pre-critical metaphysics, but instead pushes the Kantian critique into the places Kant feared to go. What Kant lacks in his critique of metaphysics is the very critique of the *Ding-an-sich*. Kant sees *das Ding* as the limit of phenomena, the thing that transcends notional thought. Žižek claims that Hegel inverts this limitation such that it is not the Kantian Thing in its inaccessible transcendence that *limits* our representational grasp. Rather it is the chaotic movement of the manifold of sensations that must be *limited* in order for phenomena to appear in the first place. This act of limiting creates both the

possibility of phenomena and the projection, or illusion, of the *Ding-an-sich* residing behind or beyond phenomenal appearances. It is for this reason that "limitation precedes transcendence," explaining why ultimately it is *phenomena* that are central to Hegel, not *noumena*.[43]

Rather than Hegel returning to a metaphysics of the Absolute, Žižek sees Hegel as reproaching Kant for keeping one foot within classical metaphysics and its beyond by clinging to *das Ding*, even if devoid of content. Instead of filling in the void of *noumena* with Absolute Knowledge, as is usually claimed, Hegel turns Kant's epistemological void into an ontological one.[44] The problem with Kant thinking of his *Critique of Pure Reason* "as the critical 'prolegomena' to a future metaphysics" is that Kant does not realize that it "*already is* the only possible metaphysics."[45] Hegel completes this critical turn not with a return to classical metaphysics, nor merely a notional non-metaphysical logic, but with an additional turn of the critical screw by claiming that the epistemological limitation for us is also the ontological limitation of the world itself.

For Žižek, Hegel completes Kant by supplementing Kant's formulation that the conditions of possibility for our knowledge are the same as the conditions of possibility of the object of our knowledge with its reverse:

> the limitations of our knowledge (its failure to grasp the Whole of Being, the way our knowledge gets inexorably entangled in contradictions and inconsistencies) is simultaneously the limitation of the very object of our knowledge, that is, the gaps and voids in our knowledge of reality are simultaneously the gaps and voids in the "real" ontological edifice itself.[46]

Rather than placing the antinomies of reason within our epistemological finitude, postulating a self-consistent thing-in-itself beyond our grasp, Hegel bites the ontological bullet and posits reality itself as inconsistent. Hegel's achievement then is that

> far from regressing from Kant's criticism to pre-critical metaphysics expressing the rational structure of the cosmos, Hegel fully accepts (and draws the consequences from) the result of the Kantian cosmological antinomies—there *is* no "cosmos," the very notion of cosmos as the ontologically fully constituted positive totality is inconsistent.[47]

As commentator Adrian Johnston notes, Žižek italicizes "is" rather than "no" when he says "there *is* no cosmos" drawing our attention to the fact that being itself *is* this inconsistency, not merely our knowledge of it, because "being 'is' this very acosmos, this unstable absence of a cohesive, unifying One-All."[48] And for Žižek's Hegel, because there is no beyond, no consistent *Ding-an-sich* in its unknowableness, the play between appearance and essence, and understanding and reason must change, leading to a changed understanding of both substance and subject.

The problem with Kant is that he does not push his critical philosophy far enough because he continues to presuppose that *das Ding* "exists as something positively given beyond the field of representation," whereas Hegel pushes this critique by claiming that "there is *nothing* beyond phenomenality, beyond the field of representation."[49] In other words, when traditional philosophy makes a distinction between something's mere appearance and its true essence, Hegel always opts for mere appearance.

Žižek makes this point regarding appearance and essence with reference to Hegel's distinction between positing reflection, external reflection, and determinate reflection.[50] Taking hermeneutics as an example, "positing reflection" is a naïve reading of a text, claiming immediate intelligibility because the text itself is perspicuous. It is "positing reflection" because it directly posits the object of its reflection. But under pressure of diverse and conflicting interpretations, "positing reflection" gives way to an "external reflection" that posits the essence of the text, its true meaning, as existing behind the text in an unattainable realm transcending our knowledge. "External reflection," then, is the admission and accumulation of distorted pieces of the text's true meaning, reflected through our finite capacities. This is the Kantian position that the appearance of the text hides its true essence, which stands behind or beyond the mere appearance. The move from "external" to "determinate reflection" is to become aware that the positing of an eternal essence behind the object is internal to the appearance of the object itself. According to Žižek, the necessity of postulating an essence behind the text is that which allows the text itself to appear. Or as Žižek says, "what appears, to external reflection, as an *impediment* is in fact a *positive condition* of our access to Truth" because "'*essence*' *itself is nothing but the self-rupture, the self-fissure of the appearance*... The fissure between appearance and essence is internal to

the appearance itself."[51] This is all another way of indicating Hegel's ontological extension of the Kantian critique of epistemology.

This difference between "external" and "determinate reflection" is mirrored in the difference between understanding (*Verstand*) and reason (*Vernunft*). For Hegel, understanding (*Verstand*) functions in the realm of the Kantian critique, of "external reflection," positing a beyond in which objects reside, eluding our discursive grasp. The movement to reason (*Vernunft*) is not to add something new to the understanding; it is not raising the understanding to a higher level within the Absolute. Rather, reason merely subtracts "the beyond" from the understanding. Between understanding and reason is not a choice between the two, but the choice to deactivate reference to any "beyond" because "Understanding, deprived of the illusion that there is something beyond it, is Reason."[52] In the end, one is always at the level of understanding, it just depends on whether there is reference to a beyond or not. The Hegelian logic of reason (the notion) is not another logic that accomplishes what the understanding failed to do (knowing things-in-themselves), but is rather the repetition of the logic of understanding without reference to a beyond, realizing itself as pure self-relation.[53] This mirrors the claim that one is always on the level of appearance, whether or not one posits that the essence stands behind appearance or one posits that appearance creates the illusion of essence (this complex issue will be further explored in the next chapter when we examine Hegel's *Science of Logic*).

A further consequence of this relationship between understanding and reason is that the typical explanation of Hegelian dialectic as moving from an initial harmony of immediate self-identity into a disharmony of difference, then resulting in a new harmony of a higher and more complex order, is shown to be false. Instead, as with the difference between appearance and essence, and understanding and reason, this new harmony is just the consummation of the loss of the original harmony, rather than a new substantial unity.[54] Hegelian dialectics does not overcome disharmony or difference, but accepts difference ontologically rather than merely epistemologically. Therefore, "far from being a story of progressive overcoming, dialectics is for Hegel a systematic notation of the failure of all such attempts—'absolute knowledge' denotes a subjective position which finally accepts 'contradiction' as an internal condition of every

identity."[55] On this view, rather than instituting the totalizing system par excellence, Hegel is advocating for the very displacement of every totalizing system.[56]

Self-divided substance, and subject

The interplay between appearance and essence and between understanding and reason, each moving through or beyond reference to a "beyond," takes us to the heart of the Žižekian project by helping us understand what Hegel means in *Phenomenology* when he says that the Absolute, or Truth, should be conceived "not only as Substance, but also as Subject."[57] For Žižek this should be taken as meaning exactly the opposite of what many suppose it to mean. The subject is not elevated to the status of some absolute substance or cosmic mind, swallowing all substantial content according to its all-devouring dialectical process. Rather, this phrase refers to the debasing of substance to the status of the divided or fractured subject. Žižek points out that *Phenomenology* is the story of the repeated failures of the subject to truly account for the world and itself. For Žižek, when Hegel says that the Absolute is "not only Substance, but also Subject," this does not mean that subjectivity is constitutive of reality, but rather that

> *there simply is no such "absolute subject"*, since the Hegelian subject is *nothing but* the very movement of unilateral self-deception… "Substance as Subject" means precisely that this movement of self-deception, by means of which a particular aspect posits itself as the universal principle, is not external to Substance but constitutive of it.[58]

The subject, then, is not elevated to the dignified status of substance, but rather substance is lowered to the fragmented level of the subject, always trying yet failing to make sense of the world. The main point for Žižek is that it is the subject that, incessantly searching behind appearances for an enduring essence, fails to understand it (the subject) is the one positing the essence behind the appearances. Hegel's idealism begins when this illusion is given up. For Žižek, "'unmasking this illusion' does not mean that 'there is nothing to see behind it'… [for] there is nothing *but this nothing itself, 'nothing' which is the subject.*"[59] What Žižek is proposing here is not a simple denial of reality within

an anti-realist perspective, which is nothing but the subjective idealism of Kant, but rather the positive functioning and existence of "nothing." The point around which sensible, phenomenal reality is organized and made meaningful is *nothing*, a nothing that *is* the subject who suspends all meaning.[60] Meaning is "suspended" by the subject in its twofold sense: that from which something hangs or is held up, or the barring or prohibiting of an action.

That subjectivity is the *nothing* around which meaning/appearance gathers means that subjectivity is always pathologically biased, limited, and distorting because while there can be no reality apart from the constituting subject (pace Kant), every subject is situated within reality while at the same time cut off from itself.[61] As Žižek says, "There is no 'absolute Subject'—subject 'as such' is relative, caught in self-division, and it is *as such* that the Subject is inherent to the Substance."[62] This structurally biased and split subject, as substance, keeps Hegel from being merely a "subjective idealist" like Kant because the subject, instead of functioning as a *Ding-an-sich*, is itself both a mere appearance while also projecting an essential substance.

Subjective destitution and sociality

On a superficial reading it might seem that, while expressing their positions in drastically different conceptual schemes, Pippin and Žižek are really in broad agreement. Both seek to reconnect the Hegelian project to the Kantian critique against the superficial historicist appropriation of the dialectic. Both articulate how the subject must assume responsibility for the world one inhabits: Pippin speaking of *Geist* as the normative realm of self-legislating reason; Žižek speaking of the lack of an "absolute subject" guaranteeing the consistency of reality. Both lead toward the realization that every subjective position is biased, and therefore constructed. Both see the realm of *Geist* as a normative distinction within thought and language placing human freedom as an achievement beyond nature, yet still within it, and therefore as non-supernatural. Or as Žižek says, spirit is "the domain of signification, of the symbolic; as such, it can emerge only in a creature which is neither constrained to its bodily finitude nor directly infinite … but in between, a finite entity in which the Infinite resounds in the guise of … Another World."[63]

But these semblances hide a profound difference between the two, revealed in their understanding of the political significance of Hegel.

Unlike Pippin who builds from the normative idea of social self-legislation, as a historical achievement constituted through various practices of mutual recognition, Žižek's Hegel does not build up toward a social theory. Instead, Žižek's exposition seeks only to repeat the same constitutive failures within differing conceptual frameworks (appearance/essence, understanding/reason, substance/subject). For Žižek, Hegel in method and in practice never moves forward in his analysis unless progress is measured by uncovering deeper conceptual failures. This Žižekian perspective reveals the difference between Pippin's evolutionary perspective of a socially normative practice of mutual-recognition, and Žižek's revolutionary perspective that the dialectic exposes the ideological frame in which such social practices exist and the radical means by which to exit those structures.

One way of understanding this is to situate Žižek alongside other political theorists through his deployment of the concepts of perversion and hysteria.[64] Much of postmodern political theory looks to the excessive or transgressive aspects of life repressed by the reigning socio-political order. Inverting Hobbes, who sought to circumscribe the riotous passions of the multitude according to the law of the sovereign, postmodern theorists seek to re-inscribe all forms of life within the political order. In this way, an ever-broadening and inclusive political field emerges through endless re-negotiations and re-articulations of the political field. For Žižek, the problem with this approach is twofold. First, giving free reign to all transgressive identities and lifestyles through transgressive political action exactly mirrors the processes of global capitalism. The market revels in breaking every rule and crossing every line, all in the effort of creating new markets for selling new products to new consumer-subjects who themselves are trained to transgress. Žižek complains that those promoting a "politics of multitude" as an ever-broadening of the political field exactly mimic the machinations of global capitalism. The "subject of late capitalist market relations is perverse" in its attempt to transgress all limits, yet in its very perversion maintains itself as a version of capitalism.[65] Second, perversion remains within the Kantian matrix of external reflection by assuming that the existing law is always partial and fragmented, and each transgression seeks to reveal this limit with reference to an unacknowledged beyond.

Why is this? Perversion, which Žižek uses in a technical sense drawing from Lacan, stays within the political order, albeit in the seemingly exterior form of transgression. Acts of perversion claim to know the symbolic law (whether the political laws of the land or the subjective laws of civility, sociality, sexuality, and rationality), and claim to know exactly how to resist this law via overt transgressions. These transgressive acts, therefore, always ultimately point to the law. Knowing the law, and then, always with an eye toward the law, transgressing the law's limit, shows the mutual implication of the existing political order and its own transgression. The law and its transgression make an articulate totality where the latter never moves beyond the frame of the former. To transgress in this way is actually a *reasonable* form of resistance within the political order because it seeks to move within the political field as a broadening, re-ordering, and re-articulation of current and future "forms of life." This form of transgression never truly moves beyond the socio-political order because to do so would mean the loss of all contact with reality, unhinging all systems of meaning and significance, and thus foreclosing the possibility of reasonable political action. Transgressive acts are different ways of describing what Pippin might call instances of the provisional and revisable nature of our practices and institutions seeking mutual recognition, the recognition of the reasonableness of one's actions. The law, its transgression, and the law's subsequent revision are, for Pippin, a desirable, evolving situation.

Žižek contends, however, that this transgressive strategy ultimately fails because it is still trapped within (because it mirrors) an economic system that feeds on transgressive forms of life even as it promotes these transgressions. This transgressive strategy is doomed to perpetuate the status quo in the form of evolutionary modifications, rather than offer any truly revolutionary break. Or said differently, this strategy posits an essence of freedom standing behind the partial and broken appearances of law. This transgressive social strategy, therefore, fails the fundamentally Hegelian lesson that positing an essence (of subjectivity, of law, of freedom) beyond its appearance is the ideological move par excellence, a failure many continental and pragmatic theorists have missed in their social theories.

For Žižek, the prevailing socio-political order cannot be *transgressed* in the form of perversion, but rather must be *traversed* in the form of hysteria.[66] The hysteric is incapable of finding her coordinates within

the symbolic network, a breakdown that simultaneously puts the symbolic order in doubt and therefore puts her own subjective position in doubt, causing what may seem to be irrational outbursts. The hysteric is in doubt about the symbolic law, not knowing what the law wants from her, and therefore is powerless in following the law.[67] Rather than transgressing the political order in vain attempts at incremental rehabilitation, Žižek proposes *traversing* the political order in the mode of hysteria, or as he elsewhere calls it, through a radical "subjective destitution."[68] Rather than seeking subjective affirmation *from* (indicating source/origin) the political order (even in the guise of transgression because in transgression one minimally affirms one's own essence beyond the social appearances), for Žižek, one ought to enact a hysterical subjective destitution *from* (indicating separation/removal) the socio-symbolic order. The figure of this subjective destitution in which "the subject accepts the void of his nonexistence" is symbolic death.[69] Only in what we might call a "psychic suicide," where one is biologically alive, yet dead to the symbolic coordinates of social, political, and economic life, is one placed in "the suicidal outside of the symbolic order,"[70] able to act with a revolutionary freedom. This is the case because the hysteric understands that she is just as divided as the social substance (the law) is. The hysteric is the political consequence of the philosophical idea that the absolute is "not only Substance, but also Subject."

Many political theorists, however, are unwilling to entertain this type of symbolic death because it seems simultaneously too *excessive* as a stepping outside the bounds of rationality and reasonability according to certain accounts of political "realism," and too *moderate* in its apparently disinterested stance toward the current state of affairs. These objectors claim such a radical break makes it impossible to reform the political order because one is so utterly beyond it, so utterly detached: too ideologically minded to be any politically good. But this is exactly Žižek's intention when he speaks of subjective destitution as death, for only when one considers oneself dead to the existing order will one be able to *act* freely with regard to it.[71] Only then will one move from piecemeal forms of transgressive resistance against the existing order toward creating the possibility of another order altogether. This subjective destitution is a radical transformation through a revolutionary *traversal* of the existing order, rather than a gradual evolution through *transgressional* reappropriations within it.

As a hysterical action of subjective destitution, this move beyond the symbolic law is characterized by a radical gesture of "striking at oneself," the gesture which ultimately constitutes subjectivity as such.[72] This "striking at oneself" is the means by which one becomes "uncoupled" from the symbolic order, dying to one's own social substance. As noted above, perversion assumes some minimal subjectivity that "knows" the limits of the law, and therefore posits itself as beyond the law. This is the ideological position that assumes an essence behind appearances, and therefore has failed to learn Hegel's dialectical lesson that substance is divided, just as the subject is divided. The hysteric denies even this minimal subjective support within the social substance, and therefore is the true figure for political action beyond and yet within this field.

Contra Pippin and Taylor, Žižek's Hegel only becomes Hegel when he abandons the Romantic project of the expressive unity of the social substance, achieved through shared social practices, and instead understands reconciliation not as a healing *of* the split between radical subjectivity and social objectivity, but as a reconciliation *with* the split as a persistent aspect of the social field.[73] This reconciliation is the political implementation of what was already argued philosophically: that dialectical reconciliation is not to a higher harmony, but a reconciliation to the persistence of fundamental disharmony. The fact that "'Substance is [also to be conceived of as] Subject' means that this explosion of the organic Unity is what *always happens* in the course of the dialectical process," and the new unity is not a new harmony at a higher, more explicit level, but rather the unity of persistent division, both within the subject and the social substance.[74] Only the hysterical subjective position can persist within this place, for "a truly free choice is a choice in which I do not merely choose between two or more options WITHIN a pre-given set of coordinates, but I choose to change this set of coordinates itself" and therefore act as Christ did (an interesting connection for an atheist to make).[75]

Žižek's many references to Christ underscore the religious aspects of Hegel totally absent from Pippin's interpretation, and most non-metaphysical interpretations of Hegel.[76] Žižek understands Hegel as putting forth Christianity as the manifest religion because Christianity articulates this negative space beyond the symbolic law

and its transgressive supplement, a new place from which political action pours forth.[77] For Žižek, "both Christianity and Hegel transpose the gap which separates us from the Absolute into the Absolute itself" such that substance and subject are always already divided.[78] Throughout *The Puppet and the Dwarf* Žižek seeks to unite fall and redemption, Adam and Christ, Judaism and Christianity, law and love according to the dialectic whereby the former is fulfilled by the latter, not in a new harmonious positivity, but rather through transposing the initial gap of the former into the latter itself. Ultimately, the gap separating God and humanity is internal to God, exemplified by the death of Christ. Rather than the death of God leading to our freedom from God, as for Nietzsche, Žižek claims that the death of God, and our participation in this death, allows us to suspend the symbolic law, just as Christ did. This is the forgotten core of Christianity, not that God is dead and we have killed him, but that God (the substance) is dead and all of us (subjects) have died with God.

Evaluation

Žižek's reading of Hegel is self-consciously politically oriented toward the successful breaking out of the regimes of global capitalism by offering a robust ontological account of the necessary failure of both the social structure and the subject, a failure which opens the very possibility of an authentic political act against and beyond the dominant order. For Žižek, Pippin's Hegel offers few resources for the type of radical act that puts previous justificatory practices into question.

Žižek, however, offers little reason why someone would enact a psychic suicide in order to enter the outside of the symbolic order. Why not rather engage in perverse acts where one can have the symbolic cake and transgressively eat it too? Žižek offers numerous examples of people willing to carry out such a radical act (Antigone, Oedipus, Jesus, King Lear), but the use of such examples only returns us to the problem of a prior social normativity. If Žižek's best examples for prompting a radical act in others refer to a counter-tradition of people resisting the status quo, then the accumulation of such examples has already begun to function as a normative tradition.

But the use of such a counter-tradition seems to imply its own law and symbolic order, all of which Žižek is opposed to in placing the subject beyond symbolic support.[79]

Conclusion

After the metaphysical Hegel proposed by Taylor come these two drastically opposed and yet typical interpretations. Broadly speaking, Pippin's Hegel offers a retrospective account of the emergence of normative practices as the pre-condition of freedom. He, however, leaves aside the emergence of individual subjects capable of resisting such engrained practices. Žižek's Hegel is explicitly oriented toward offering an account of the subject within and beyond the ideological interpellation of society's dominant social practices. But the place from which this subject acts, the place of its own subjective destitution, is always a prior (counter-) normativity that Žižek must simultaneously presuppose and yet disavow. Pippin offers a Hegel emphasizing the self-transcending immanence of normative practices (yet assuming a prior subject formation), and Žižek offers a Hegel emphasizing the self-transcending immanence of the radical act (yet assuming a prior normative formation). In either case, the normative Hegel of evolutionary social practices and the radical Hegel of revolutionary subjective acts are interpretations of Hegel opposed to each other in fundamental ways, though each seems to require a version of its opposite.

   This fundamental opposition prompts the question of which is more adequate to the texts of Hegel and which is more adequate to the questions of contemporary political theory. Can Hegel hold together both normative social practices while also offering the possibility of a radical subjectivity capable of resisting such practices if the need were to arise? Being able to answer this question first requires an understanding of Hegel's philosophical system. Only then will one be able to adequately assess the textual interpretations offered above and their political implications. Chapter 2, therefore, will offer an entry into Hegel's system through an examination of his *Science of Logic* and then a reading of his *Phenomenology*. Chapter 3 will then assess Hegel's political philosophy with an eye toward resolving this fundamental opposition between Pippin and Žižek in regard to Hegel's

philosophy of self-transcending immanence. These will set the table for a contrast with Augustine's theology of God's self-immanenting transcendence.

Notes

1 E §23 R.
2 This is especially true of Pippin and Žižek, but also Hardimon, Franco, and Lewis as we will see below and in Chapter 3.
3 Charles Taylor, *Hegel* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1975), 3–50.
4 Taylor, *Hegel*, 79.
5 Taylor, *Hegel*, 82–86.
6 Taylor, *Hegel*, 84.
7 Taylor, *Hegel*, 85.
8 Taylor, *Hegel*, 44, also 90–92.
9 Taylor, *Hegel*, 109.
10 For a general overview of a non-metaphysic interpretation of Hegel, see Simon Lumsden, "The Rise of the Non-Metaphysical Hegel," *Philosophical Compass* 3/1 (2008): 51–65.
11 Robert B. Pippin, *Hegel's Idealism: The Satisfaction of Self-Consciousness* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 5. Examples, for Pippin, of a right Hegelian would be Charles Taylor's interpretation of Hegel, and Alexandre Kojève would represent a typical left Hegelian. Regarding his comment on his own left Hegelianism, see Robert B. Pippin, *Hegel's Practical Philosophy: Rational Agency as Ethical Life* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 58.
12 Jean Jacques Rousseau, "Of the Social Contract," in *Social Contract and Other Later Political Writing*, ed. and trans. by Victor Gourevitch (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 1.1.1. Pippin summarizes this inheritance from Rousseau to Kant to Hegel in "Hegel, Ethical Reasons, Kantian Rejoinders," *Philosophical Topics*, 19/2 (1991): 99–103.
13 Jean Jacques Rousseau, *The First and Second Discourses and Essay on the Origin of Languages*, ed. and trans. by Victor Gourevitch (New York: Harper and Row, 1986), 199.
14 Rousseau, "Of the Social Contract," 1.7.8. Regarding this account of Rousseau and his influence on Hegel, also see Frederick Neuhouser's *Foundations of Hegel's Social Theory: Actualizing Freedom* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000), 55–81.
15 Immanuel Kant, *Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals 3rd edn*, trans. by James W. Ellington (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1993), 30.
16 Pippin, *Hegel's Practical Philosophy*, 75 and 87. See also Paul Franco's *Hegel's Philosophy of Freedom* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), 11–20.

17   Pippin, *Hegel's Practical Philosophy*, 111.

18   Pippin, *Hegel's Practical Philosophy*, 39.

19   Pippin, *Hegel's Practical Philosophy*, 48.

20   Pippin, *Hegel's Practical Philosophy*, 45–46.

21   Pippin, *Hegel's Practical Philosophy*, 46.

22   Pippin, *Hegel's Practical Philosophy*, 61.

23   Pippin, *Hegel's Practical Philosophy*, 51. In this Pippin agrees with Taylor's interpretation of human nature for Hegel, but not Taylor's application of this to *Geist*.

24   Pippin, *Hegel's Practical Philosophy*, 52.

25   Pippin, *Hegel's Practical Philosophy*, 54.

26   Pippin, *Hegel's Practical Philosophy*, 42.

27   Pippin, *Hegel's Practical Philosophy*, 61.

28   Pippin, *Hegel's Practical Philosophy*, 112.

29   Pippin, *Hegel's Practical Philosophy*, 195.

30   Pippin, *Hegel's Practical Philosophy*, 202.

31   Pippin, *Hegel's Practical Philosophy*, 209.

32   Pippin, *Hegel's Practical Philosophy*, 191.

33   Chapter 3 explains the interrelationship of family, civil society, and the state.

34   Pippin, *Hegel's Practical Philosophy*, 272.

35   Pippin, *Hegel's Practical Philosophy*, 266.

36   Pippin, *Hegel's Practical Philosophy*, 270.

37   Pippin, *Hegel's Practical Philosophy*, 276.

38   Pippin, *Hegel's Practical Philosophy*, 265.

39   Jeffrey Stout's *Democracy and Tradition* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), also makes a similar claim about the achieved social normativity of giving and receiving reasons. See also Robert B. Brandom's *Making it Explicit: Reasoning, Representing, and Discursive Commitment* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994), on which Stout substantially relies.

40   Pippin, *Hegel's Practical Philosophy*, 236–237.

41   See Pippin's concluding comments that Marx was right about Hegel, that philosophy *only* comprehends the world. Pippin, *Hegel's Practical Philosophy*, 272.

42   Slavoj Žižek, *The Indivisible Remainder: on Schelling and Related Matters* (London; New York: Verso, 1996), 6.

43   Slavoj Žižek, *Tarrying with the Negative: Kant, Hegel, and the Critique of Ideology* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993), 37.

44   Žižek, *Tarrying with the Negative*, 246.

45   Slavoj Žižek, *The Ticklish Subject: The Absent Centre of Political Ontology* (New York: Verso, 1999), 85 (italics in original).

46   Žižek, *The Ticklish Subject*, 55.

47   Žižek, *The Ticklish Subject*, 60 (italics in original).

48   Adrian Johnston, *Žižek's Ontology: A Transcendental Materialist Theory of Subjectivity* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2008), 130.

49 Slavoj Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (New York: Verso, 1989), 205 (italics in original).

50 Žižek, *Sublime Object*, 213.

51 Žižek, *Sublime Object*, 214 (italics in original). See also, Slavoj Žižek, *The Parallax View* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2006), 214.

52 Žižek, *The Ticklish Subject*, 86.

53 Žižek, *The Indivisible Remainder*, 124.

54 Žižek, *The Indivisible Remainder*, 105.

55 Žižek, *Sublime Object*, 6.

56 Žižek, *The Indivisible Remainder*, 130.

57 Here I am following Žižek's translation. Miller translates "*nicht als Substanz, sondern ebensosehr als Subjekt*" as "not only as Substance, but equally as Subject" (PS ¶17/PG 23).

58 Žižek, *The Ticklish Subject*, 76.

59 Žižek, *Sublime Object*, 195 (italics in original).

60 Žižek, *The Indivisible Remainder*, 59.

61 Žižek, *The Ticklish Subject*, 78–79.

62 Žižek, *The Ticklish Subject*, 89.

63 Žižek, *The Indivisible Remainder*, 60–61.

64 The next several paragraphs are revised from my "Subjects between Death and Resurrection: Žižek, Badiou, and St. Paul" in *Paul, Philosophy, and the Theopolitical Vision: Critical Engagements with Agamben, Badiou, Žižek, and Others* (Theopolitical Visions Series), ed. Douglas Harink (Eugene: Cascade, 2010), 155–175.

65 Žižek, *The Ticklish Subject*, 248.

66 Žižek, *The Ticklish Subject*, 265–269.

67 Žižek, *Sublime Object*, 112–114, and *The Ticklish Subject*, 247–257.

68 See *The Ticklish Subject*, 366; *Sublime Object*, 230; *The Indivisible Remainder*, 163–165.

69 Žižek, *The Ticklish Subject*, 281.

70 Slavoj Žižek, *Welcome to the Desert of the Real: Five Essays on September 11 and Related Dates* (New York: Verso, 2002), 99.

71 Žižek, *The Ticklish Subject*, 260–264.

72 Žižek, *The Fragile Absolute*, 148–150.

73 Žižek, *The Ticklish Subject*, 95.

74 Žižek, *The Ticklish Subject*, 96 (bracket in original).

75 Slavoj Žižek, *Belief* (New York: Routledge, 2001), 121.

76 A recent exception is Thomas A. Lewis, *Religion, Modernity, and Politics in Hegel* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), to whom we will turn in Chapter 3.

77 Žižek, *The Fragile Absolute*, 145.

78 Slavoj Žižek, *Puppet and the Dwarf: The Perverse Core of Christianity* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2003), 88.

79   Another way of stating this criticism is by following Bruno Bosteels, who show
     how Žižek equivocates between Lacan and Badiou on the nature of subjectiv-
     ity and the act, an equivocation between the Lacanian subject, which assumes
     the impossibility of subjectivity, and the Badiouian subject faithful to an event.
     These two "subjects" are, for Bosteels, irreconcilable. See his "Badiou without
     Žižek," *Polygraph: An International Journal of Culture and Politics* 17 (2005):
     221–244, esp. 235–238.