

HARTMANN, KOLB, PIPPIN AND THE UNHAPPY CONSCIOUSNESS

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"Meta" discussions in philosophy are a bit like the media talking about the media, i.e., they are prone to generating a lot of heat and seldom any light. On the other hand, more "disciplined" exegetical efforts have a way of implicitly taking stances on macro-interpretive issues, with the defect of being assumed and hence not argued for. With these twin dangers in mind, I propose to examine the motivations of the thinkers who are currently offering up Neo-Kantian domestications of Hegel. I am referring to the interpretations put forth by Klaus Hartmann, David Kolb and Robert Pippin. I will first sketch their interpretations and will then show how even in the *Logic* Hegel disallows for the thought/object dualism which so stubbornly clings to their interpretations. Next, I will argue that Hegel implicates the reader in the system and thereby provides hermeneutical guidance. (I will argue that Hartmannian approaches are accounted for in the Unhappy Consciousness section of the *Phenomenology of Spirit*.) I will conclude by bringing out an implicit aspect of Pippin which points to an ontological reading of Hegel. Because Hartmann has the most crystalline position (and as it is perhaps the origin of the others), I propose to start with his essay "Hegel: A Non-Metaphysical View."

Hartmann reads the *Logic* as a reconstruction. It must be presuppositionless and so there must be a provisionally granted (being-in-itself/implicit) content which via necessary progressions (the process of becoming-for-itself/explicit) acquires determinacy. In this manner, thought is the unmoved mover which "grounds" itself. But Hartmann takes "thought thinking itself" rather literally. Which is to say that he sees the whole process as thought playing with itself. For Hartmann, there is a radical bifurcation between thought and reality (nature), "Hegel's philosophy appears to us as categorial theory, i.e., as non-metaphysical philosophy, or as a philosophy devoid of existence claims" (Hartmann, p.274). Accordingly

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he sees thought as innocuous: "Similarly, if one says that the architectonic is an imposition on pre-existing material, such criticism is mistaken, since the architectonic can be taken as an innocuous ordering in the interest of rationality" (Hartmann, p. 275). There is no fear of the categories imposing on nature because they have been developed based on the "satisfaction of reason" instead of fit with nature.

We might better understand the moves he is making by considering the differences between geometry and engineering. Geometry might be said to satisfy the demands of reason (admittedly not in the same way as Hegel's categories) whereas engineering is instead concerned with empirical fit with nature. Just as geometry treats the idea of a triangle, so engineering treats the actually existent triangle. And just as Hegel's categories (in the *Philosophy of Right*) deal with the idea of a state, so the political theorist deals with the actually existent state. It is important to note that Hartmann is not merely offering a descriptive account of Hegel's behavior but also normative guidance. When Hegel gets carried away and "goes metaphysical," it is seen by Hartmann as an illicit though forgivable rhetorical flourish:

the fault of Hegel's may be ... that he makes concessions to existential considerations. ... thus creating existential bonds between society and the state. This move is understandable, in the sense of "forgivable," in view of historical precedent and even language, but cannot be defended in theory. ... If we thought these flaws away, the account of the state would be more abstract, but also more correct (Hartmann, p. 282).

As Hartmann's essay proceeds, he becomes more candid about saddling Hegel with an interpretation which doesn't fit. He labels any indigestible aspects of Hegel as "maximal" claims which are in turn "indefensible." In a crucial admission, Hartmann reveals the criteria which have been driving his reading all along:

We feel free to single out that systematic core of Hegel's philosophy which exhibits strictness. In that

sense, the interpretation presented here can stand for a "minimal" interpretation, or for a non-metaphysical interpretation, of Hegel (Hartmann, p. 286).

Hartmann repeatedly says that the value of his interpretation is that it delivers strictness. Herr Hartmann began his essay by staking out the reading he is most anxious to derail,

[Findlay] claims that in Hegel we have a system of affinities or of non-strict, loose, probabilistic implications between concepts. ... The difficulty is, however, that on this view Hegel's theoretical achievement, the dialectic, hinges on an irrationality, on likelihood and affinity rather than on strictness" (Hartmann, p. 268).

The reader is advised to remember terms like "non-strict," "loose" and "probabilistic." It will be instructive to watch how these same terms (and the agenda/proclivities they announce) show up in our other Neo-Kantians (though the whipping boy does change from Findlay to Taylor).

Before I draw out any conclusions, I want to get my other two commentators on board. I find a strong internal tension present in Kolb's and Pippin's interpretations of Hegel. I sense they want the purity and necessity that a transcendentalist reading will provide, but are more cognizant (than Hartmann) of the senses in which Hegel resists this imposition. Nevertheless, at key points I find the Hartmannian sympathies manifest. I will first identify those areas and will later include the sense in which Kolb and especially Pippin point to a metaphysical (by which I mean ontological) reading of Hegel which they are perhaps too concerned with "rigor" to endorse.

Kolb has slightly more in common with Hartmann, so I will treat him next. As indicated, I am going to first accentuate those aspects of Kolb which parallel Hartmann. Kolb sees the logic as the core of Hegel's system. He also views Hegel as doing Kantian transcendental analysis: "Hegel's logic will be a metaphysics in this Kantian sense, a study of the necessary structure of thought" (Kolb, p. 41). According to Kolb, the order of Hegel's categories is systematic and necessary. He also depicts the movement of the categories as going

from implicit to explicit, or from simpler to richer determination. For Kolb, the logical categories develop autonomously; they are "self-sufficient." Whatever his misgivings, Kolb lines up squarely behind Hartmann with this move:

We would expect that the "absolute knowledge" attained at the end of the *Phenomenology of Spirit* and worked out in the system would be a definitive ontology stating what is real and what is not. Instead it is a transcendental deduction of what is valid (Kolb, p. 87).

Kolb, like Hartmann, is conscious of the fact that sometimes Hegel doesn't behave himself. When Kolb can not convincingly recast what Hegel is doing in terms of transcendental analysis, he too is willing to dismiss such anomalies as rhetorical or juvenilia (or both):

Sometimes Hegel uses images suggesting that the universal is some vaporous force or energy or life circulating through things. Hegel never entirely shook off the rhetorical influence of the romantic images he used in his youth (Kolb, p. 62).

On the thorny issue of concrete reality, Kolb has this to say:

[that] Hegel's discussions of concrete reality ... continue the development of the logical categories ... is not easy to understand, and it is not helped by Hegel's vague and metaphorical descriptions of the relation of the logical idea to concrete reality (Kolb, p. 85).

I think Kolb is drawn to transcendental analysis for some of the same reasons Hartmann is. Kolb is also anxious to derail irrational spirit monism:

When I say the logic is not a metaphysics, *I want most of all* to preclude the idea that Hegel provides a cosmology including the discovery of a wondrous

new superentity, a cosmic self or a world soul or a supermind (Kolb, pp. 42-43; *emphasis added*).

Kolb also is concerned to wean us of our existentialism—or in his words, our “voluntarism.” Kolb is well aware that talk of separate logical categories is precarious, but for him there is a larger threat,

Talking of logical categories as if they were things on their own is dangerous. But still more dangerous is talking as if categories of thought were tools that we make and shape at will. English-speaking philosophy has a strong voluntaristic bent (Kolb, p. 48).

I think this is a telling formulation in that we are invited to consider what the opposite of “voluntarism” might mean. Does scientism come to mind? While Kolb may not consciously endorse scientism, I mention it because it resonates with the profile I have been constructing. What might philosophical scientism look like? I suspect that (like Hartmann) not too far behind Kolb’s adoption of transcendental analysis lie concerns with strictness, rigor, necessity, discipline, closure and certainty and their correlate fears of irrationality, looseness, contingency, ambiguity, mysticism, romanticism, arbitrariness and relativism. One wonders if Hartmann and Kolb are willfully putting a spin on Hegel in the interest of rigor. But then Kolb tells us (approvingly) that this is precisely what Hartmann is doing:

On the question of what Hegel was doing, Hartmann does not seem to go far enough. *On the more important issue of what is possible for our thinking today, Hartmann’s proposal is more cautious and more acceptable than Hegel’s.* In fact, Hartmann is not so much trying to interpret Hegel as to correct him and make him useful today. He takes the idea of categorial justification to be the core of Hegel’s thought, but a core betrayed by Hegel’s full system. *Corrected and made more rigorous,* Hegel can be important today (Kolb, p. 94; *emphasis added*).

Precisely what might it mean to make Hegel “more rigorous”? I

don't think it means deeper. In fact, I'm fairly sure it means more disciplined, i.e., more algorithmically rule-governed. Before I show how this obsession with rigor is just an entrance ramp to the "highway of despair," I must first get some hardware from my third Neo-Kantian.

Pippin hopes in his conceptual scheme that idealism can be a middle ground between the poles of "precritical metaphysics" and "the bloodless dance of the categories." But on my reading of Pippin, this middle ground amounts to colluding the two poles in a very sophisticated though, in the end, misleading way. As with Kolb, there is a deep tension in Pippin's interpretation. Accordingly, I will proceed in a similar manner. I will first argue why it is helpful to look at Pippin in light of Hartmann, and later I will have recourse to the other strand of his thought.

Pippin is Hartmannian in that he is offering a transcendental, nonmetaphysical interpretation. It is transcendental in that Hegel is seen as responding to a question like "What are the conditions for the possibility of having a conceptual scheme?" The sense in which it is nonmetaphysical is a bit more complicated. Early on, in a footnote, Pippin gives us an initial clue as to what nonmetaphysical might mean: "Hegel is, like Kant, an 'antirealist,' not a metaphysical realist" (Pippin, p. 262). By "antirealism," Pippin is referring to the sense in which objects cannot exist independently. The germ for this "antirealism" is the Kantian discovery that there must be an 'I' which accompanies my representations—that the subject's "hard-wired" concepts are ineluctably constitutive of experience. This apperceptive theme is the tool Pippin uses to build his bridges between Kant and Hegel.¹ By "metaphysical realist," Pippin is referring to those readings of Hegel which suggest that there is some extra-subjective force (call it Geist, Oversoul, Supermind, God) existing in the world. By portraying Hegel as an antirealist, the locus quickly shifts to apperception/self-consciousness. Pippin takes very seriously the idea that thought determines itself—hence the title *Hegel's Idealism: The Satisfaction of Self-Consciousness*.

This apperceptive theme applied to the *Logic* yields a reading which views the progression of the categories as an autonomous,

¹ Regarding Hegel's purported anti-Kantianism, Pippin tells us, "Hegel's rhetorical bark is worse than his appropriating bite when it comes to Kant" (Pippin, p. 248).

organic self-actualization. One might label this an "internalist" reading, "So to ask whether the fundamental elements of our conceptual scheme are true is to ask if they 'agree with themselves' or proceed from the self-determining power of the Notion itself" (Pippin, p. 240). When describing thought (notionality) Pippin consistently uses terms like "autonomous," "internal," "self-determination" and "self-grounded." But these terms have a cash value only if they are understood with reference to their correlates (i.e., externality, otherwise determined or grounded). This is the key ambiguity in Pippin's interpretation.

The very term, "conceptual scheme," suggests a subject who employs it and an object realm to which it is applied. I sense that Pippin would not appreciate this formulation, but I'm wondering if he isn't trading on our intuitions regarding the meaning(s) of this term. Ludwig Siep, in a review of Pippin's book, suggests that this is indeed how Pippin is understanding "conceptual scheme": "It looks as if he [Pippin] still understands the conceptual scheme as a means of reference to extra-subjective and extra-conceptual reality." He later adds, "Hegel at the end of the *Logic* claims to have shown once and for all that there is no 'outside' and no 'other' for the self-determination of the concept" (Siep, pp. 74-75).

The crucial question facing Pippin is, "Is there any meaningful sense in which we can speak of an 'outside' to the scheme?" If not, then talk of schemes becomes misleading. My sense is that the term was chosen with care and that Pippin is not in a hurry to relinquish it. It is a piece of hardware he needs to make a clean distinction between thought and object (between the necessary, rule governed behavior of the notion, on the one hand, and mere externality, on the other). This leads us to the question of why Pippin would be interested in a bifurcation between thought and object in the first place. This brings us back to Hartmann and Kolb. In their cases, I pointed out that by their own admissions, they were subverting Hegel in the interest of "rigor." I suspect and will now attempt to show, that a similar motive is behind Pippin's Kantian reading.

Motivations are a very difficult thing to get our hands on, but Pippin provides us some indication in the text. He initially justifies his Neo-Kantian approach "with the hope that there is some *philosophically useful payoff* in reading Hegel so intensely in the light of Kant's actual project" (Pippin, p. 7; *emphasis added*). Pippin also

appears to be aware of the sense in which his interpretation doesn't accord with Hegel's ambitions, "I believe that Hegel's texts [have] the resources for reading him this way without anachronism, and with philosophical merit, but it is certainly true that Hegel himself seems often much more ambitious about his system" (Pippin, p. 259). What is the "philosophically useful payoff" which justifies this revision of Hegel? Thomas Wartenberg speculates that the "payoff" is the unearthing of a systematic core behind Hegel's dialectical excesses:

The guiding principle of their interpretations is therefore to isolate the argumentative structure that will allow the name "Hegel" to stand for an intelligible position on contemporary philosophic issues. For this reason they seek to unveil the "rational core" behind the "mystifying shell" of Hegel's idealism (Wartenberg, p. 121).

I think this impulse also stands behind Pippin's polemics against spirit monism. He, like Hartmann and Kolb, uses terms like psychology, pre-critical, romantic, pragmatic, existential, mysterious, loose, ambiguous, arbitrary, etc. when he is denigrating metaphysical readings.

Hartmann, Kolb and Pippin are united in that they are all offering interpretations of Hegel which see him as answering Kantian transcendental questions as opposed to ontological questions. They also are similar in their recognition that Hegel himself would not countenance their readings and finally, their interpretations are driven by an urge to find strictness, rigor and discipline in Hegel. I am going to argue that in their zeal for necessity they are driven to a formalism characteristic of what Hegel called the "understanding." This fixation with rigor, "cannot see when it has reached its limit; nor, if it has transgressed that limit does it perceive that it is in a sphere where the categories of understanding, which it still continues rudely to apply, have lost all authority" (*Logic*, p. 289). I will now consider how well their interpretation accords with Hegel's texts.

In surveying some of the recent Hegel scholarship, one notices how contentious the issue of relation amongst Hegel's texts is. In fact, the choice of which Hegelian text is primary goes a long way towards determining one's stances on a whole host of macro-interpretive

issues. Accordingly, most Neo-Kantians see the *Logic* as the primary text (the others are merely derivative applications of the dialectical method). The *Logic* also is (conveniently) the easiest text to view through a Kantian lens. So as not to construct a straw man, I will show how even in the *Logic* (esp. the Doctrine of the Notion) their reading leaves key moves unaccounted for.

Toward the end of the Doctrine of Essence, Hegel is more circumspect on the issue of contingency than our Neo-Kantians would have us believe: "we must guard against being so far misled by a well meant endeavor after rational knowledge, as to try to exhibit the necessity of phenomena which are marked by a decided contingency" (*Logic*, p. 206).² What I am interested in taking issue with is the formalism which stands behind their desire for rigor. On this question Hegel has much to say. In the beginning of the Doctrine of the Notion, Hegel chastises those who would posit a Platonic-like bifurcation between logical forms and the content to which they apply:

The Logic of the Notion is usually treated as a science of form only, and understood to deal with the form of notion, judgement and syllogism as form, without in the least touching the question whether anything is true. The answer to that question is supposed to depend on the content only. If the logical forms of the notion were really dead and inert receptacles of conceptions and thoughts, careless of what they contained, knowledge about them would be an idle curiosity which the truth might dispense with. On the contrary they really are, as forms of the notion, the vital spirit of the actual world (*Logic*, p. 226).

Hartmann's portrayal of thought as "innocuous" or as a "luxury" simply does not comport with either the spirit or (as we see here) the letter of Hegel's writings. For Hegel, the Idea (the culmination of his system) is defined as the unity of subject and object, of the ideal and the real, of the finite and the infinite, of soul and body (*Logic*, pp. 276-77). Externality, particularity and contingency are preserved in the

²Here Hegel is simply reiterating Aristotle's guidance from the *Nicomachean Ethics*, "it is the mark of an educated man to look for precision in each class of things just so far as the nature of the subject admits" (Aristotle, pp. 24-26 1094b).

reconciliation—not abstractly negated. It is for this reason that Hegel has a home for existentialists in his system. An interpretation which reintroduces a cleavage between thought and existence we might tentatively name “Kantian dualism.” Pippin refers to it as “the problem of ‘returning’ to the empirical world, once one rejects empiricism or a naturalist realism in favor of original, constitutive conditions” (Pippin, p. 259). I submit that here Pippin (through his interpretation) is foisting Kant’s problem onto Hegel. Hegel remonstrates *ad nauseam* on the incorrigible urge to indulge the “Either-Or” of the Understanding,

the Logic of Understanding ... believes thought to be a mere subjective and formal activity, and the objective fact, which confronts thought, to have a separate and permanent being. But this dualism is a half-truth: and there is a want of intelligence in the procedure which at once accepts, without inquiring into their origin, the categories of subjectivity and objectivity (*Logic*, p. 255).

This is all a rather long winded way of saying Hegel has something to say on hermeneutical issues. I submit that the context which informs (en-forms) the *Logic* is thoroughgoing. Another way of evincing this feature is to ask the question, “Is the meaning of the categories in the *Logic exhaustively defined* by their place in the dialectical process?” Is the *Logic* an enclosed architectonic of words and ideas which then stand in opposition to externality? [Pippin’s “unreal” particulars] (Pippin, p. 236). On my view, it is not. I read the *Logic* as part of a system which exhibits a thoroughgoing monism. There is a sense in which the *Logic* isn’t a whole but as a moment of the Hegelian corpus, is the whole. This essay might be seen as an application of this insight. It does so by considering the sense in which the reader is *implicated* in the system. It is symptomatic of Hartmann’s formalism that in his approach he assumes Hegel provides no guidance regarding the application of “strictness” as the criteria which adjudicates interpretations. What appears to be a meta-textual issue is, for Hegel, subsumed in the system.

Hegel opens the Doctrine of the Notion by asserting, “The Notion is the principle of freedom” (*Logic*, p. 223). This is not mere hyperbole,

nor are the political overtones unintended. I think Hegel (like the Greeks and against modernity) sees epistemology and ontology as fundamentally linked (if not speculatively identical). Said another way, epistemology (truth) and ethics/politics (virtue), for Hegel, should not and can not be radically divorced from each other. I think this sentiment is behind his rather paradoxical use of "freedom" in a book on logic.

One might ask, "So, how and where does Hegel implicate the reader and provide hermeneutical guidance?" I will argue that a Hegelian response to Neo-Kantian domestications of his thought can be found in the Self-Consciousness section of the *Phenomenology of Spirit*. To make my project more manageable, I will argue that Hartmann's Either-Or (either thought or reality) can be seen as an example of the inwardly disrupted nature of the Unhappy Consciousness (insofar as I have been successful in bringing to light the Hartmannian sympathies in Kolb and Pippin, then this characterization will also hold for them).

The Unhappy Consciousness is marked by a thoroughgoing bifurcation between universality and particularity:

the simple Unchangeable, it takes to be the essential Being; but the other, the protean Changeable, it takes to be the unessential. The two are, for the Unhappy Consciousness, alien to one another; and because it is itself the consciousness of this contradiction, it identifies itself with the changeable consciousness, and takes itself to be the unessential Being, it must at the same time set about freeing itself from the unessential, i.e. from itself (*PS*. p. 127).

Many commentators see the Unhappy Consciousness exemplified in the Christian—esp. in Kierkegaard. I think one can find a secular correlate in what I have dubbed "Kantian dualism." The desire to posit a beyond (noumena) of knowledge is the very same quest for "the unchangeable"—in this case for the *a priori*. This is matched by an equally vehement renunciation of contingency—of "the protean changeable." Ludwig Siep, while criticizing Pippin's transcendental reading of Hegel, also sees a connection between Christian and philosophical longing for transcendence: "the conception of a be-

yond for our knowledge and desire is at the same time that basic feature of the Christian religion, which transfers true reality into a 'transcendence'" (Siep, p. 67). Kant's noumenal realm, the Christian God and Hartmann's attempt to carve out a realm for necessity are linked in their construction of a "beyond." Further, the Christian's conception of sin is equivalent to the Hartmannian renunciation of contingency in that they are both a denial of the body—the *a posteriori*, the changeable, the inessential, the deviant, the messy, gritty, playful vitality that is life.

Hartmann longs for purity; he feels soiled by the shadows on the cave wall. These mere appearances will not deliver the stable certainty he yearns for. In this regard he reminds us of Nietzsche's depiction of the ascetic priest.³ Out of impotence, the priest (like today's logicians) wallows in his life inimical resentment. Perhaps truth is less like Hartmann's geometry and more like Nietzsche's woman.⁴ Are we trapped on the "highway of despair"—tragically forced to choose *either* Hartmann's barren formalism *or* Nietzsche's (& Rorty's) free spirited relativism? Hegel hoped reason could provide some kind of reconciliation between universal and particular, between subject and object, between the ideal and the real, between the actual and the rational. Hegel tells us we need, "To recognize reason as the rose in the cross of the present and thereby to delight in the present" (*Philosophy of Right*, p. 22).

I conclude with a suggestion. I see aspects of Pippin's account

³ Rorty adds an interesting (and I think in this case applicable) gloss on Nietzsche's description of the ascetic priest. "Such a person shares Nietzsche's endlessly repeated desire for, above all else, cleanliness. He also shares Heidegger's endlessly repeated desire for simplicity. He is likely to have the same attitude toward sexual as to economic commerce: he finds it *messy*. So he is inclined both to keep women in their traditional subordinate place, out of sight and mind, and to favor a caste system which ranks the manly warriors, who bathe frequently, above the smelly traders in the bazaar. But the warrior is, of course, outranked by the priest—who bathes even more frequently and is still manlier. The priest is manlier because what is important is not the fleshy phallus but the immaterial one—the one which penetrates through the veil of appearances and makes contact with true reality, reaches the light at the end of the tunnel in a way that the warrior never can" (Rorty, p. 72).

⁴ "Supposing truth is a woman—what then? Are there not grounds for the suspicion that all philosophers, insofar as they were dogmatists, have been very inexperienced about women? That the *gruesome seriousness, the clumsy obtrusiveness* with which they have usually approached truth so far have been awkward and very improper methods for winning a woman's heart?" (Nietzsche, p. 2; *emphasis added*).

which, if altered, point to the kind of ontological reading I am more sympathetic with. If we substitute *logos* for conceptual scheme, we can ameliorate the sharp schism between subject and object which plagues Pippin's Kantian interpretation. Kolb provides a working definition:

For the Greeks, *logos* (speech, argument, reason, gathering together) names that common principle of definiteness and unity that makes thinking, speaking and acting possible. ... *logos* is the primal gathering that forms and allows unity within any sphere of beings or thought" (Kolb, p. 57).

Whereas "conceptual scheme" is more like language (and hence suggests a *user* and a realm of objects to which the scheme *applies*),⁵ *logos* is closer to a shared, intersubjective historical context—our collective horizon (or *Geist* if you prefer). And in that sense it has a way of gathering the subject and the object together. It allows for the monism Hegel had in mind. In short, I think Hegel is a live enough option without Kantian ornamentation.

⁵For a tight treatment of "conceptual scheme" and the problems it is plagued by see Davidson, D. "On the Very Idea of a Conceptual Scheme."

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