The Persistence of Subjectivity

On the Kantian Aftermath

*The Persistence of Subjectivity* examines several approaches to and criticisms of the idea at the heart of the self-understanding of the modern Western, or “bourgeois,” form of historical life: the free, reflective, self-determining subject. Since it is a relatively recent historical development that human beings have come to think of themselves as individual centers of agency and to believe that entitlement to such a self-determining life is absolutely valuable, raising such a question also raises the question of the historical location of philosophical reflection itself. What might it mean, that is, to take seriously Hegel’s claim that philosophical reflection must always be reflection on the historical actuality of its own age? In discussions of Kant, Hegel, Heidegger, Gadamer, Adorno, Leo Strauss, Arendt, Manfred Frank, and John McDowell and in examinations of modern institutional practices and modernist art and literature, Robert Pippin challenges a number of prevalent views about both the nature and the value of “leading one’s own life.”

Robert B. Pippin is the Raymond W. and Martha Hilpert Gruner Distinguished Service Professor in the Committee on Social Thought, the Department of Philosophy, and the College at the University of Chicago. He is the author of several books on German idealism, including *Kant’s Theory of Form*, *Hegel’s Idealism: The Satisfactions of Self-Consciousness*, *Modernism as a Philosophical Problem*, and, most recently, *Henry James and Modern Moral Life*. He is winner of the Mellon Distinguished Achievement Award in the Humanities and was a Fellow at the Wissenschaftskolleg in Berlin.
The Persistence of Subjectivity

On the Kantian Aftermath

ROBERT B. PIPPIN

University of Chicago
Contents

Acknowledgments page vii

1 Introduction: “Bourgeois Philosophy” and the Problem of the Subject 1

PART I  SETTING

2 The Kantian Aftermath: Reaction and Revolution in Modern German Philosophy 27

PART II  THEORISTS

3 Necessary Conditions for the Possibility of What Isn’t: Heidegger on Failed Meaning 57
4 Gadamer’s Hegel: Subjectivity and Reflection 79
5 Negative Ethics: Adorno on the Falseness of Bourgeois Life 98
6 The Unavailability of the Ordinary: Strauss on the Philosophical Fate of Modernity 121
7 Hannah Arendt and the Bourgeois Origins of Totalitarian Evil 146
8 On Not Being a Neo-Structuralist: Remarks on Manfred Frank and Romantic Subjectivity 168
9 Leaving Nature Behind, or Two Cheers for Subjectivism: On John McDowell 186

Postscript: On McDowell’s Response to “Leaving Nature Behind” 206
### Contents

**PART III  MODERN MORES**

10 The Ethical Status of Civility  
11 Medical Practice and Social Authority in Modernity  

**PART IV  EXPRESSION**

12 “The Force of Felt Necessity”: Literature, Ethical Knowledge, and Law  
13 What Was Abstract Art? (From the Point of View of Hegel)  
14 On “Becoming Who One Is” (and Failing): Proust’s Problematic Selves

*Bibliography*  
*Name Index*  
*Subject Index*
Acknowledgments

Earlier versions of these chapters have appeared in the following publications and I am grateful for permission to reprint. In most cases the revisions for this volume have involved brief expansions or qualifications, or most often additions to the footnotes. The postscript to chapter 9 appears here for the first time.

Acknowledgments


I am especially grateful to two institutions: the Wissenschaftskolleg zu Berlin, where I was in residence in 2003–4 and so could complete work on the introduction, the postscript to chapter 9, and the revisions to various chapters; and the Andrew M. Mellon Foundation, whose Distinguished Achievement Award in 2001 supported much of the final editorial work on this volume. Special thanks to Thomas Bartscherer, Bo Earle, Hugh Liebert, and Jonny Thakkar for their assistance in preparing the manuscript and index.
The Persistence of Subjectivity

On the Kantian Aftermath