

Introduction

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Few philosophers, if asked to explain what philosophy is, would reflect explicitly about its relation to history or historical change. Yet philosophers are clearly influenced by their own times, and philosophy itself – its doctrines, aims, and methods – changes significantly through history. By contrast to most philosophers, Hegel is famously responsive to this fact about history and change: He gives a philosophical account of philosophy that emphasizes its historical character. Of course, many aspects of Hegel's account are routinely criticized; he is often said to attempt to understand human history and philosophy itself in terms of an overarching, progressive narrative, an attempt then taken to be arrogant or imperialistic, or simply impossible. But if historically situated philosophers are to understand their own discipline and practice, then Hegel's question should be faced squarely: Can we understand philosophy in a historical manner, without reducing it to a mere historical epiphenomenon?

Some philosophers may see no need to face such questions. But once the topic is broached, one can see how widely philosophers frame their work in terms of tacit assumptions about overarching historical narratives. This is equally true of those who ignore Hegel's account, and of those who reject it. And it is equally true of the two major approaches to philosophy currently, so-called continental and analytic philosophy, as well as many who work in the history of philosophy. For example, many Kantians believe that Kant's critical philosophy was a revolution, from which there is no turning "back"; there is no serious possibility that one might justifiably "revert" to precritical, realist metaphysics or ethics. Many in the continental tradition follow Kant in that respect. This narrative about the critical revolution in turn brings along preferences for certain ways of approaching philosophy. For example, some will approach it in a way that privileges versions of Kant's question about whether the mind or the world is prior when it comes to explaining the status of representations in relation to objects. Others endorse skepticism about overarching historical narratives, including Hegel's – but in a way that amounts to another overarching, progressive narrative, insofar as

they think that contemporary thought has gone beyond the need for such narratives, and that there should be no question of going “back” to providing them. Alternatively, many influenced by the successes of the modern natural sciences suggest that these successes render it now impossible to revive anything from earlier metaphysics – from Aristotle’s metaphysics, for example. They often seek to conform their practice of philosophy to the model of progress they see in the natural sciences as well. Others hold that twentieth-century advances in symbolic logic and formal methods are what distinguish contemporary philosophy “from a pseudo-science” and “give us reasonable hope of doing better than our predecessors.”¹ They will, of course, approach philosophy in light of such formal methods. In all these cases, different philosophical approaches are closely connected to (often unacknowledged) historical narratives. So it again seems important to reflect on the historical character of philosophy and on whether we inevitably conceive of current philosophical practice in light of views about its place within a larger historical narrative. Such consideration will in turn raise pressing questions: Do skeptical implications about philosophical results follow, because the choice among competing narratives and accompanying approaches to philosophy is merely arbitrary, stemming from some combination of personal preference and historical contingency? Or can we identify philosophical reasons to prefer certain views about philosophy and history over others? Does the historical character of philosophy itself set a philosophical task, as Hegel suggests?

Some might see, in the tendency of philosophers to avoid explicit reflection on history, a suggestion that systematic philosophy in general aims for an impossible kind of transcendence of history. Perhaps constructive, systematic philosophy seeks by its very nature to step out of history, specifically to separate itself from other forms of culture in achieving a timeless insight that might ground all other forms of culture – seeks, as Rorty memorably puts it, to be an “all-encompassing discipline which legitimizes or grounds the others.”² Those who find Rorty’s doubts concerning this enterprise persuasive will likely be ambivalent about Hegel: On the one hand, they may admire Hegel’s opposition to separating philosophy from other forms of culture – from art or social and political conditions. They may also want to enlist Hegel’s opposition to epistemological foundationalism in their own cause. On the other hand, they will likely also see Hegel as tragically continuing to pursue systematic philosophy, unable to draw the correct lesson about its hopelessness, and uncritically promulgating a progressive account of history in order to avoid facing that hopelessness.

¹ Williamson 2013, p. 429. ² Rorty 1979, p. 6.

But the live options are not exhausted by the alternatives of such wholesale skepticism about systematic philosophy, on the one hand, or an ahistorical account of philosophy, on the other. This can be seen clearly in the work of Robert Pippin, the contemporary philosopher who has most explicitly and extensively worked out a sophisticated Hegelian answer to Hegel's question. Pippin proposes that we conceive of the history of philosophy as tending toward modern philosophy; its aspiration to self-criticism or reflective self-grounding in particular is part of and advances the development of autonomy that characterizes human history more broadly. In part, this proposal takes the form of an extremely influential contemporary interpretation of Hegel. In part, it takes the form of a general account of a kind of historical progress, now without any straightforward, triumphant culmination in some ideal, reconciled "end of history," but rather as leading us to the "problem" of modernity, a challenge both to human beings collectively and to individuals to interpret and reinterpret their own histories, cultures, and normative claims. Pippin's view thus brings out a sense in which philosophy always belongs to history, having different possible relations to its time and the development of autonomy. Yet, remarkably, this specific sense of the historical character of philosophy leads directly away from skepticism about the prospects for systematic philosophy, for it continues in many ways the tradition of Kant and post-Kantian idealists of systematic theorizing about practical and theoretical matters, building from consideration of the character of spontaneity and self-legislation to discussion of many other philosophical questions. Perhaps more remarkably still, this endorsement of systematic philosophy does not close philosophy off from other forms of culture; Pippin's work opens up and explores rich new connections to visual art, literature, and film and engages in philosophical consideration of current social and political conditions.

Pippin's neo-Hegelian work, in other words, takes up the positive and new philosophical task Hegel formulated, and that many of his successors – from Nietzsche to Habermas – aimed to accomplish in their own ways as well. Philosophers do in fact find questions interesting, pressing, and salient in light of their historical situations, in light of the broader cultural and historical phenomena. Some systems of beliefs or values now appear unsustainable, others as "intuitive" insights or judgments that must be accommodated by any philosophical theory. Acknowledging this fact about the practice of philosophy might lead one, again, to Rortyeian skepticism. But it might lead one also to recognize a distinctive form of the most basic philosophical task of self-understanding: in Hegel's terms, to comprehend one's time in thought. It is the task of philosophy, on the conception Hegel most emphatically introduced to the tradition, to discern, to

render explicit, the implicit rational or irrational forms of contemporary culture and its historical roots and meanings, not simply to dismiss such conditions and contexts as mere facts to be transcended but to attempt to make sense of, find order in, or rationally criticize current social and political institutions, cultural practices, and correlative philosophical understandings. This is crucial to philosophical self-understanding or self-examination as well: Philosophy can understand the “intuitions” or pre-understandings by which it orients itself only if it attempts to render philosophically explicit its own situation.

Attending to Hegel’s proposals concerning philosophy in history also opens up philosophically compelling ways to understand the post-Hegelian tradition, including even anti-Hegelians, as (at least in part) a continuation and contestation of this Hegelian theme. Against some current, somewhat reductive lines of interpretation, for example, we need not take Nietzsche’s central concern to be to naturalize philosophy, so as to trim philosophical ambition. Nor that Nietzsche aimed primarily to show that philosophy unrealistically aims to transcend history, so that we would do better to be less ambitious and more skeptical. Rather, Pippin proposes that it is both interpretively and philosophically more compelling to take Nietzsche to be addressing a topic that he shares with Hegel, even if he comes to radically anti-Hegelian conclusions about it. Nietzsche too aims to address the way in which history has tended toward the realization of equal recognition of everyone’s autonomy and so equal value. But he concludes that our concern with reassuring ourselves about our modernity, in this sense, is misguided and even dangerous – in part because it is a hankering for reassurance about respects in which we have become too unambitious, reconciling ourselves to the hollow happiness invented by what Nietzsche calls “the last human.”

Similarly, Horkheimer and Adorno develop critical theory in an anti-Hegelian direction in a certain respect. They too reject the apparently triumphalist Hegelian claims concerning historical progress, and even the desire to reassure ourselves philosophically concerning such progress, taking this desire to be a symptom of an underlying obsession with instrumental control and domination. But the central task of critical theory as they conceive it is, more broadly, the Hegelian task of philosophical comprehension of one’s own culture, making explicit its rationality or (more likely) diagnosing and thereby trying to contribute to eradicating its irrational tendencies and historical origins.

More recently, Jürgen Habermas too has developed an extensive alternative approach to answering Hegel’s question about philosophy and history. Habermas seeks to carry forward what he takes to be the Enlightenment ideal of the critique of authority, an ideal he takes to be

influential within much of modern philosophy. (This is a view of the task of modern philosophy with which many contemporary neo-Hegelians agree.) But, according to Habermas, philosophers after the Enlightenment face a “central historical crossroads”: They are faced with the choice between the modern “philosophy of consciousness” or intersubjective paradigms, such as that developed in Habermas’s own theory of communicative action. To choose the philosophy of consciousness, as Hegel (as well as, surprisingly, Nietzsche, Adorno, and Horkheimer) is supposed to have done, is ultimately to blunt the force of Enlightenment critique; they “stood before alternative [and better] paths they did not choose.”³ In Hegel’s case, this faulty choice leads him to sublate civil society into the power of a state conceived on the model of a conscious subject. But again, more broadly, even in proposing this criticism of Hegel, Habermas too can be said to be attempting to fulfill the Hegelian task of philosophical reflection in the service of historical self-understanding, including justificatory or critical attention to contemporary culture, to philosophical practice within it, and to the historical trajectory both inside and outside philosophy within which it ought to be understood.

This volume is a collection of essays in honor of Robert Pippin. They address a set of issues at the center of Pippin’s own work, particularly those raised by Hegel’s attempt to understand philosophy historically, and the various philosophical reactions to that project. Each essay addresses Hegel in the context of broader consideration of the history of philosophy, and in light of the need to understand current cultural phenomena critically, historically, and philosophically. Hegel’s proposals concerning the historical character of philosophy are, as we have mentioned, a crucial early articulation of, and attempts to answer, these questions in the Western philosophical tradition, and thus they are likely sources of insight and fruitful reflection. Focusing on them also brings with it historically attuned attention to concepts that are at present dominant both in philosophical discussion and in contemporary Western culture, and that were identified by Hegel as distinctively modern: autonomy (or freedom) and self-consciousness. More broadly, practicing philosophy through engaging in the history of philosophy – here primarily about Hegel himself – allows our authors to engage in the sort of historically informed, self-reflexive thinking that, we have suggested, is so crucial for philosophy. In philosophically confronting thought from the past, one is called on not to assume that questions, arguments, positions are “behind” us irrevocably, but to consider whether, to what degree, and why that might be so, or not. Might we be able to retrieve the Hegelian

³ Habermas 1987, p. 295.

philosophical past, as Hegel aimed to retrieve central insights, particularly from Aristotle (as discussed in a number of the following essays)? Or, as those authors here who take up positions expressly “after” Hegel discuss: What about our current historical position, our artistic, social, or political context, our ongoing historical experience of the practice of philosophy might drive us to seek modifications of or to reject outright the Hegelian proposals? The history of philosophy of course can also call attention to the ways in which current philosophical discussion is framed by “intuitive” starting points or guiding assumptions about which questions are central, driving, or philosophically worthy, as those starting points and assumptions may well not be shared by philosophers of other periods. One may, through engaging in the history of philosophy, come to understand how and why such assumptions came to play the role that they do, as Hegel aims indeed to show us, for example, about the centrality of concepts such as autonomy or self-consciousness. But such study can also highlight the ways in which those starting points preclude others, or somehow rule out from the start asking other, perhaps important questions. So, we have suggested, Hegel calls our attention to the currently often unasked question of how to understand philosophy in history.

The first part of the volume includes reflections by philosophers John McDowell, Sally Sedgwick, and Ludwig Siep concerning the general Hegelian claim that philosophy, indeed all “spirit” – everything from self-consciousness to rational philosophical thought – must be conceived as embedded in history, and so somehow in historical terms. McDowell and Sedgwick can be seen as taking up two opposed positions on how to understand Hegel’s claim to situate philosophy in history.

In his essay, McDowell builds on his previous work on Hegel, where he accepts Pippin’s proposal that Hegel’s basic aim is to radicalize Kant’s idealism while defending somewhat different accounts of Kant and Hegel within the context of that shared project. Here, McDowell argues that Hegel has at base an Aristotelian conception of spirit, that is, of what we ourselves are. Thus, he argues, Hegel’s position is not compatible with a claim many contemporary interpreters – largely following Pippin – see in Hegel, namely, what McDowell calls the “collective self-making” claim. On that view of Hegel, Geist is, in Pippin’s terms, “a kind of socio-historical achievement.” Because all normativity is instituted, rather than grounded by what we “ontologically are,” “*we make ourselves into actual agents* [in fact rational subjects in general . . .] *over historical time.*”⁴ McDowell argues that a part of this approach goes awry, and that we

⁴ So McDowell quotes Pippin 2008a, pp. 42, 62, and 17, respectively, in his essay.

should not organize “our interpretation in terms of” issues about “the legitimation of normative authority” (14). On Hegel’s conception, then, “spirit” is the human form or essence, present at all stages, in all contexts, of human life, across history. This form may require historically developing conditions for its full exercise or most complete activity. Philosophy specifically may have needed to undergo a historical development to recognize the character of this essence. But spirit is not dramatically historical in the manner suggested by the self-making claim.

By contrast, Sedgwick argues that Hegel’s claims in the *Science of Logic* concerning the necessity of his results should not be understood to refer to an achievement of permanent, unrevisable, timeless truths concerning the pure forms of thought, derived in a somehow presuppositionless manner. Hegel denies that any philosopher can have entirely presuppositionless knowledge or that thought can ever have distinct, separable a priori forms. Hegel’s arguments in the *Logic* are thus firmly to be distinguished from Kantian transcendental arguments. Rather, Sedgwick suggests, the necessity Hegel claims for his logic refers to the way in which concepts or connections among them are rendered intelligible in a larger systematic whole. Such necessity is neither presuppositionless nor purely formal, but rather grounded on the prior history of philosophical thought, and connected to substantial philosophical commitments of philosophical reason (*Vernunft*). Hegel’s philosophical claims are therefore meant to be, Sedgwick contends, historically conditioned, and so fallible and revisable.

In a way combining the approaches to Hegel endorsed by Sedgwick and McDowell, Siep argues that Hegel occupies positions *both* “inside” and “outside” the stream of history: Hegel both (in McDowell’s and Sedgwick’s terms) establishes essential truths and understands himself and thinks as a historically conditioned thinker; or, in Siep’s own terms, Hegel both comments on or renders explicit the commitments and conflicts of his own culture and takes up a position beyond or immune to radical, transformative historical change. Hegel’s twin approach to philosophical practice poses a problem that we continue to be unable to solve satisfactorily – Siep argues. Namely: the position of reflective participant (“inside” culture) is insufficient to ground robust normative criticism of cultural practices or norms, while the “outside” position requires laying claim to a teleological conception of history or a completeness of metaphysical thought to which twenty-first-century philosophers do not take themselves to be entitled. Siep suggests that another element of Hegel’s procedure in the *Phenomenology* – learning from cataclysmic, emotionally charged, communal experiences of breakdown or normative failure – may be the way forward for philosophers or those who reflect on cultural norms more generally.

The essays in the second part of the volume consider aspects of Hegel's proposals concerning philosophy as a historical discipline, and his own historical-philosophical practice of philosophy, in light of questions about Hegel's relations to or interpretations of philosophical figures and movements prior to him. Paul Redding opens this section with a powerful and innovative interpretation of some key arguments in Hegel's historical conception of philosophy, and of the Hegelian view concerning the role of logic within philosophy. Against Kojève's "quasi-anthropological" reading of Hegel's famous master-slave dialectic, Redding emphasizes that this dialectic is succeeded, in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, by an account of Stoicism. He suggests that Hegel is here providing "a historical account of philosophy itself." Aristotle's conception of philosophy, on this view, is akin to the master's attitude, where the master seeks independence, but in a way that leaves him dependent, undercutting his own self-conception. The Aristotelian philosopher, working with Aristotle's logic, turns out to be from Hegel's point of view unacceptably dependent on a passive reception of essences. The slave, famously, was more active, in working on and changing the world – even if he cannot appreciate the importance of this as a seed of the independence sought by the master. The Stoic conception of philosophy is similar, Redding claims: Stoic logic more actively takes up and transforms its objects, now conceived not as Aristotle's worldly essences but as representations, specifically, as representations in language. And this is the lens through which we can then better understand Hegel's own famously difficult "Logic of the Concept," and the idealism, emphasized by Robert Pippin, involved in his claim there about the importance of our own transformative activity – our self-legislation – in logic and conceptual activity more broadly.

Robert Stern and Terry Pinkard return to issues opened by McDowell's essay concerning Hegel's relation to Aristotle. Stern concentrates more on Hegel's ethics but makes a case similar to McDowell's: Hegel's ethics is in many respects a version of Aristotelian perfectionism. This interpretation is supposed to rule out some popular contemporary claims about Hegel – again claims often associated with Pippin's interpretation. Especially important here is the claim that a Kantian self-legislation thesis – a kind of independence of spirit from nature – plays the central role in ethics. Where McDowell argued that even Kant is not committed to every aspect of the self-legislation thesis so central to Pippin's interpretations of both Kant and Hegel, Stern allows that Kant may be so committed but focuses on arguing that Hegel's Aristotelianism prevents him from making central to his ethics a social and historical version of that self-legislation thesis.

Pinkard seeks to defend another position in the debate about the Aristotelian and Kantian strands present in Hegel's thought, and their relationship. While recognizing the enormity of the task of showing that Hegel can and does combine a kind of Aristotelian naturalism with a strongly social and historical version of Kantian self-legislation, Pinkard seeks here to lay some groundwork for that larger project. In part, he does so by formulating the sense of Aristotelian naturalism at work in Hegel, as well as its limitations (on Hegel's view) in accounting for our own agency, or spirit. And in part, he reflects on the methods and importance of engagement with the history of philosophy. Though Pinkard's project requires approaching Hegel in twenty-first-century terms (such as "normativity" or "acting for reasons"), he argues that this need not mean distorting Hegel. Rather, it is exemplary of the best way of engaging with the history of philosophy: explaining older texts in a manner that discovers a *lingua franca* we can share with them.

Rolf-Peter Horstmann focuses on other important questions concerning Hegel's relation to Kant. In some sense of the term, Kant aims to discard or replace "metaphysics," and Hegel disagrees. Horstmann argues that it would be hasty to assume that Hegel's move here is a reversion relative to philosophical progress marked by Kant. For one thing, the premises from which Hegel builds are in some respects compelling – even where they contrast with some of Kant's own conclusions, such as those concerning things in themselves. Further, Hegel's claims – in particular, that we can comprehend what objects are in their truth, and that doing so requires understanding objects as also, in a sense, subjects – can be considered not to "regress" from Kantian insights but rather to elaborate and perfect them. Thus, Horstmann suggests, we may discern a Hegelian developmental, even teleological structure in the history of philosophy, at least in the historical development from Kant to Hegel, if not perhaps in the less than generous subsequent reception of Hegel. While such an investigation would be a larger project than Horstmann takes on here, he proposes that the history of philosophy since Hegel may have made available other, post-Hegelian ways of defending the basic Hegelian insight about objects and subjects.

Karl Ameriks likewise treats Hegel as a post-Kantian thinker, but in a rather more anti-Hegelian vein. He endorses some general Hegelian claims: As Hegel contends, philosophy ought to be understood as historical and ought to be explicit about its presumptions concerning its own history. Ameriks proposes, however, that we should look to Romantic, rather than Hegelian, forms of such engagement with philosophy and its history as our models. On Ameriks's presentation, Hegel (together with Reinhold, Fichte, and the non-Romantic Schelling) continues to endorse

an early modern (pre-Kantian) conception of philosophy, as the production of complete, certain systems of knowledge, on the model of the natural sciences (or, perhaps, even aiming to surpass them). Such systematizing, for Hegel and similar post-Kantians, is newly taken to require specifically a systematic account of human history and of philosophy within it. Ameriks suggests that one might rather follow the Romantics in understanding philosophy as a more modest and fragmentary enterprise, not attempting to provide a progressive narrative but rather presenting more focused, opportunistic, and not forcibly integrated interpretations both of its own history and of cultural history more broadly, including its own cultural moment.

The third part of the volume includes essays that likewise endorse the Hegelian aim of understanding philosophy as a historical enterprise but challenge the narrative, univocal, progressive character of the Hegelian approach in attempting to satisfy that aim. Their challenges are enunciated, in one way or another, from historical-philosophical positions self-consciously “after” Hegel.

Christoph Menke and Axel Honneth provide, first, alternative philosophical understandings, both based on Hegel and departing from him, of human history as a history of freedom. Menke argues that the tensions within the concept of autonomy, revealed in the history of modern philosophical discussion, do not vindicate a Hegelian, but rather a Marxist or Nietzschean genealogical view of history. History is to be conceived not as a rational, self-correcting process, nor as the self-actualization of autonomy, but rather as a contest between power and power. To support this contention, Menke not only traces the tensions in the previous versions of the concept of autonomy as diagnosed by Hegel but also invokes Hegel’s own concept of “second nature” to indict Hegel of a similar tension. Hegelian second nature is, Menke argues, social norms made habitual or “naturalized,” taken as given; for Hegel, he contends, it is both necessary to and necessarily rejected by self-constituting, free spirit. Spirit makes itself what it is by rejecting the socially natural, but spirit is also real in the world only by functioning as second nature, the ultimate, unquestioned norms or place where questions of justification end. Hegel’s own place in the history of philosophy should likewise not be understood, Menke implies, as a culmination of philosophical debates about autonomy, but as a new elaboration of the promise and difficulties of this paradigmatically modern concept and historical aim.

Like Menke, Honneth concurs with the Hegelian claim that history is the history of freedom. Here, as elsewhere in his work, he continues as well the Habermasian philosophical project of attempting to continue the Enlightenment tasks both of critique and of understanding and