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NOT NON-METAPHYSICAL, BUT JUST AS MUCH METAPHYSICAL. PIPPIN'S HEGEL AND THE STATUS OF SUBJECTIVITY

by Edgar Maraguat*

Abstract. *I consider two claims on the status of human subjectivity that Robert Pippin combines in his re-examination of Hegel. One is the claim that human subjectivity (along with agency and freedom) is a historically achieved status conferred by social recognition. The other is the claim that there is a logical argument that proves the indispensability of a teleological, indeed intentional, and non-naturalistic description of self-conscious human beings and actions. The first contains, arguably, a non-metaphysical view. The second, however, implies a metaphysical conception. Though the unification of opposites is not unwelcome in a Hegel interpretation, I argue that in this case the resulting tension is not properly solved in Pippin's terms. Therefore, I advocate a different approach to the metaphysical argument for subjectivity in the Science of Logic as wholesale cure for the coherence problems that affect Pippin's reading.*

Keywords. *Subject; Substance; Metaphysics; Transcendental; Apperception; Recognition; Agency; Freedom; Teleology; Kant*

1. *A subject with substance*

The task of philosophy is, according to Hegel, to offer a unifying view of the contradictory determinations of all finite things, in the most general sense of the word 'things'. The most well-known statement of this reconciliatory endeavor is found in the Preface to the *Phenomenology of Spirit* (1807), where Hegel remarks that a properly philosophical cognition requires us to grasp and express the true not as *substance*, but just as much as *subject*: «nicht als Substanz, sondern eben so sehr als Subject»¹.

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The terms of this formula acquired their meanings through the German reception of Spinoza in the last two decades of the 18th century, as the discussion of Spinoza's *Ethics* and then recent (particularly Fichte's) attempts at a refutation of it in Hegel's *Science of Logic* indicates². Substance represents therein the 'blind' causal relation, while subject stands for self-movement and «personality». It follows from that claim — which must be taken literally, as an exact expression of the goal of philosophy, even if it violates German (and English) grammar — that the true is necessity that, without ceasing to be necessity, manifests itself as freedom³.

Kant had already tried to provide a conciliation between natural, causal, necessitated substantiality and spontaneous, free, and hence 'self-causing' subjectivity, notably in the 'solution' of his *Critique of Pure Reason* to the antinomy traditionally raised by the Aristotelian idea of prime mover and its modern application to

¹ G.W.F. Hegel, *Gesammelte Werke*, Hamburg, Meiner, 1968 ff., vol. 9, p. 18 (abbreviation: GW; references are to volume and page number). A.V. Miller translates: «[...] but equally as *subjects*»; Terry Pinkard: «[...] but rather even more as *subject*». I follow here Robert Pippin's suggestion (R.B. Pippin, *You Can't Get There from Here: Transition problems in Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit*, in *The Cambridge Companion to Hegel*, ed. by F. Beiser, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, pp. 52-85, p. 59) and also Félix Duque's (F. Duque, *Remnants of Hegel. Remains of Ontology, Religion, and Community*, Eng. transl. by N. Walker, Albany (NY), SUNY Press, 2018, p. 17, p. 136). This is not an unusual formula in Hegel's prose. An early variation can be found in the 1801 *Differenzschrift*: «Die wahre Antinomie, die beydes, das Beschränkte und unbeschränkte, nicht nebeneinander, sondern zugleich als identisch setzt, muß damit zugleich die Entgegensetzung aufheben» (GW 4, p. 29). Sometimes Hegel even combines the two adverbs or adverbial phrases ('at the same time' and 'just as much'), as in the 1830 *Encyclopedia*: «Sie [die Existenz] ist daher die unbestimmte Menge von Existierenden als in-sich-reflectierten, die zugleich eben so sehr in-anderes-scheinen, relativ sind [...]» (GW 20, p. 153, § 123).

² GW 12, p. 15.

³ GW 20, pp. 175-176. I agree with Pippin on the centrality of the claim: «The whole point of speculative idealism is to think *substance* as *not-just-substance* [...], and so as the negation of *mere substance* as such; and also to think subject as substance, what is *not-mere-subject*» (R.B. Pippin, *Hegel's Realm of Shadows. Logic as Metaphysics in The Science of Logic*, Chicago & London, University of Chicago Press, 2018, p. 143).

the explanation of human action. But Kant's strategy to reconcile the idea of an unconditioned principle of activity and the opposed idea of an indefinite series of causes and effects consisted in introducing a new opposition: a divide between cognizable, empirical appearances and non-cognizable, non-empirical things-in-themselves. The result was the proof that an uncaused causality may well be thought or is 'intelligible', even if we cannot know or even imagine how it is possible at all⁴. Thereafter, Kant developed an argument for the indispensability – for us, sensible rational beings – of the representation of an unconditioned principle of activity behind our judging and acting, though admitting that this indispensability is only practical⁵.

It was the conjunction of his argument for the intelligible compatibility between opposed perspectives on activity based on his doctrine of the limits of understanding and his argument for the only practical indispensability of the intentional perspective or stance that, for Kant, provided a sufficient satisfaction of our interest in a moral view of human life, while for others, like Hegel, it constituted an illusory conciliation of contradictory concepts and ultimately a non-reconciled, squint view of allegedly only apparently self-moving teleological creatures such as we appear to be.

Accordingly, we must see Hegel's intentions in working out a whole new system of philosophy as responding to his dissatisfac-

⁴ I. Kant, *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*, ed. by J. Timmermann, Hamburg, Meiner, 1998, A 558/B 586 (abbreviation: KrV; references are by first edition [A] and second edition [B] pagination numbers).

⁵ The 'addition' properly occurs in Kant's *Critique of Practical Reason*, where Kant builds upon his previous defense of the compatibility between the idea of natural order and the idea of transcendental freedom an argument for the objective reality, 'in a practical reference', of freedom (*Kant's gesammelte Schriften*, ed. by Königlich Preussischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, Berlin, Reimer, 1913, vol. 5, pp. 42-44; abbreviation: AA; references are to volume and page number). The consciousness of the moral law and the consciousness of freedom are one and the same thing, and the first may be called a *fact* of reason, because «es sich für sich selbst uns aufdringt» (AA 5, p. 31). The voice of reason is «so deutlich, so unüberschreibbar, selbst für den gemeinsten Menschen so vernehmlich [...]» (AA 5, p. 35).

tion with Kant's conciliation, which was itself a response to unresolved conflicts in the metaphysical tradition⁶. Because of this connection with tradition and the nature of the problems that were addressed in this context, we can certainly consider that Hegel's was a *metaphysical* project. Yet, he never tried to emend old arguments or offer better arguments for one or another of the traditional positions, but rather to cancel the – in his view – underlying conceptual oppositions that sustained the conflicts⁷, so we could say for good reasons, too, that his was a post-metaphysical project or, likewise, a *non-metaphysical* project. To call it metaphysical, just as to call it non-metaphysical, would be both acceptable and misleading.

However, Robert Pippin used to present it as non-metaphysical⁸. In his case, one of the main reasons for doing so was that Hegel firmly opposed Kant's belief that freedom should be regarded as a non-natural type of causality. Coherently, Hegel did not work on a metaphysical argument for proving the existence of non-natural types of causality. For Pippin's Hegel, freedom is rather a social status, the effect of the recognition that agents like us accord their peers to be participants in particular discursive practices. Being a free agent, according to his account, amounts to having significant elbow room for action in the social space, rather than to having a supernatural power. The account is arguably non-metaphysical not because a debate on freedom in a cosmological sense, to put it in Kantian terms, is regarded as

⁶ Hegel stresses the importance of Kant's chapter on the Antinomy of Pure Reason in his *Science of Logic* (GW 11, p. 114, p. 147). Significantly, the 'third conflict' of the Antinomy deserves a discussion in the body of the text, namely, in the chapter on «Teleology», not in the «Remarks». The revision of Kant's antinomies played the most prominent role in Hegel's lessons on the Logic in Nürnberg, and served as an important thread in the presentation of his account of speculative philosophy in the *Differenzschrift*.

⁷ See GW 4, p. 13.

⁸ R.B. Pippin, *Hegel's Idealism: The Satisfactions of Self-knowledge*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1989, p. 92, p. 167.

thoroughly unintelligible, but because freedom and subjectivity are taken here for social objects⁹.

It is tempting to interpret this non-causal conception of freedom as a compatibilist view of sorts. There is, however, a risk in adopting this meta-description. One might think that the description of actions in intentional terms is just an option for spectators, at most a legitimate option with a good deal of practical added value. The social status view of agency and freedom might appear as a variation of Kant's practical indispensability conception of intentional language. However, it was a main explicit aim of Hegel's system to offer an alternative to Kant's brand of compatibilism, including his defense of a stereoscopic or, better, dual view of human action.

I believe that it is precisely in order to resist the assimilation of Hegel's conciliatory project to Kant's conciliatory arguments that Pippin has recently laid so much stress on the 'metaphysical' ambitions of Hegel's philosophy¹⁰. For his Hegel, being an agent

⁹ Ten years before the publication of Pippin's *Hegel's Idealism*, Robert Brandom had advocated a non-causal approach to Hegel's concept of freedom similar to Pippin's. Although Brandom did not designate his approach 'non-metaphysical', the contrast between 'metaphysical terms' and 'the idiom of social practices' emerges at some point in his paper (R. Brandom, *Freedom and Constraint by Norms*, «American Philosophical Quarterly», XVI (3), 1979, pp. 187-196, p. 195). I am using 'non-metaphysical' as a placeholder for this sort of social account of freedom and, by extension, of intentionality and subjectivity. I do not pretend this designation to imply that Hegel's Logic is, for Pippin or Brandom, a 'category theory' in Klaus Hartmann's sense. For other uses of 'non-metaphysical' and 'anti-metaphysical' in the context of the contemporary Hegel reception, either broader or narrower, see F.C. Beiser, *Hegel, A Non-metaphysician? A Polemic Review of H. T. Engelhardt and Terry Pinkard (eds.)*, Hegel Reconsidered, «Bulletin of the Hegel Society of Great Britain», XVI (2), 1995, pp. 1-13; T. Pinkard, *What is the Non-Metaphysical Reading of Hegel? A Reply to Frederick Beiser*, «Hegel Bulletin», XVII (2), 1996, pp. 13-20; J. Shaheen, *Reading Hegel (Anti-)Metaphysically*, «Australasian Philosophical Review», II (4), 2018, pp. 433-439.

¹⁰ See R.B. Pippin, *Reconstructivism: On Honneth's Hegelianism*, «Philosophy and Social Criticism», XL (8), 2014, pp. 725-741; Id., *Finite and Absolute Idealism: The Transcendental and the Metaphysical Hegel*, in *The Transcendental Turn*, ed. by S. Gardner & M. Grist, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2015, pp. 159-172; Id.,

– a subject that subjects and is not subjected – is not something that we more or less contingently happen to be, as, e.g., in the past among Etruscans and ancient Romans the appearance of the liver of sacrificed sheep and poultry happened to be the reliable sign of the will of the gods. It is obviously not accidental that it was our ancestors who took livers to have this meaning and not conversely. Pippin thinks that Hegel had something important to say about why humans could do that – indeed had to do that, i.e., invest some objects with a particular meaning – with livers or some other things. And it is not just that in practice we cannot help doing so, for whatever reason. He takes Hegel to have offered a ‘logic’ – a metaphysical logic – of intentionality, that is, an argument for the necessity and truth – and not just the historical role, heuristic value, pragmatic efficacy, rhetorical performance, and the like – of intentional language used to make sense of the practice of granting objects and events some significance. Indeed, it seems to me that Pippin thinks that those who do not appreciate this contribution miss or mistake the reconciliatory project for overcoming antinomies that Hegel pursued.

Now, how can his social status view of agency hang together with the claim that there is a logical-metaphysical argument that shows that being an agent is not enjoying an empirical, natural, psychological status, nor the result of the ‘simple acknowledgment’ that we cannot act except under the idea of freedom (according to some version or other of the argument for practical indispensability), nor a simple matter of social-historical fact? It all depends, I think, on the details of Pippin’s reconstruction of the metaphysical argument. And my impression is that these details combine only problematically with the core social status view, as I will try to show in the following. Nevertheless, I agree with Pippin that Hegel had metaphysical ambitions, and hence cannot but applaud the fact that he now presents the truth of the subject, in Hegel’s view, as *not non-metaphysical, but just as much metaphysical*. Once again, this may sound contradictory, but it

Die Aktualität des Deutschen Idealismus, Berlin, Suhrkamp, 2016; and especially Id., *Hegel’s Realm of Shadows*.

might be one of those contradictions that Hegel claimed that philosophical thought must firmly hold to¹¹.

2. *Being an agent as a social, non-metaphysical status*

I will outline two concepts of the status of subjectivity that have a capital role in Pippin's reanimation of Hegel (sections 2 & 3), then explain why a dissonance immediately emerges between these concepts, although Pippin does not seem very sensitive to it, probably because one of them is ultimately less important in the overall account than he admits (section 4), and after that, very briefly, I will outline the attractions of a different understanding of Hegel's arguments on subjectivity in *The Science of Logic* (section 5).

I begin by sketching Pippin's view on the status of freedom, for Hegel, as a social status that humans can attain historically. One of the clearest formulations of this view is offered in Pippin's paper titled *What is the Question for which Hegel's Theory of Recognition is the Answer?*, published in 2000. The question is: What is the nature of freedom and where does the very possibility of it lie? And the answer, for Pippin, shows that freedom is a cognitive status and that reciprocal social recognition is the true condition of its possibility. Freedom is a social status, so Pippin argues, roughly in the way that being a land surveyor or being a janitor is a social status, given that the only thing necessary for someone to *be* a free agent is simply that other agents regard him or her as one of them.

The analogy is the following. The socially recognized land surveyor is able to draw the limits of a plot of land, and the socially recognized janitor is able to open and close a public establishment. Similarly, an agent whose freedom is socially recognized is able to, e.g., make promises, keep his or her word, answer for what he or she does, apologize, occasionally excuse others for what they did, and the like. On the other hand, an alleged land surveyor may have opinions on the limits of a terrain

¹¹ GW 11, p. 287.

or a forest, or a castle, but cannot actually *draw* their limits; his or her opinions do not have the value of those of the land surveyor. The false janitor can also push the door of the building and open it as a matter of fact, but this does not *open* the establishment to the public. Similarly, an agent whose freedom is not socially recognized can perhaps say ‘I’ll be there, I promise’, or even ‘I won’t tolerate this!’, but cannot fail to keep his or her word, cannot reach an agreement with others on any matter, cannot offer an explanation of what he or she did, or others did, and so on.

In essence what Hegel is claiming is that ‘being an agent’ is not to be analysed in terms of properties and inherent capacities but as itself a kind of collective social construct, an achieved state. The notion rather functions a bit like ‘being a speaker of a natural language’; where vocalisations count as speaking the language only within a language community that takes such vocalisations to commit the speaker to various proprieties and entitlements. Or, in a simpler example, one ‘is’ a philosophy professor only by being taken to be one, only in conforming to the norms that establish such a role, which norms exist only as social artifacts. It may sound strange to suggest that something so important to us as being an agent could have the same artificial status, and it seems much more intuitive to think of ‘rational agent’ as falling into the class of ‘featherless biped’ or ‘being a female’, but that, I am claiming, is Hegel’s position¹².

It does indeed sound strange. As I said earlier, the notion is probably a compatibilist one, though its compatibilism is *sui generis*¹³. Like other compatibilist views, it overtly abandons the

¹² R.B. Pippin, *What is the Question for which Hegel’s Theory of Recognition is the Answer?*, «European Journal of Philosophy», VIII (2), 2000, pp. 155-172, pp. 162-163.

¹³ Pippin himself remarks that ‘compatibilism’ is a very underdetermined label, even a misleading one, since it characterizes a merely ‘permissive’ position (see

common-sense assumption of special human causal powers, a could-have-done-otherwise power for acting that we were reluctant to attribute to natural non-human agents or artificial agents of sorts. But for many reasons that I would like to mention, even if I have no space here to discuss each of them properly, it is not a classic compatibilist notion, like those of Hobbes, Hume, or Davidson.

(1) To begin with, Pippin's Hegel does not take freedom as a capability to act in accordance with the desires or pro-attitudes that agents have. If freedom is rather a status or a state that an agent has achieved, it cannot be a capability, in the usual sense of the word: it is rather an authorization that others attribute to and recognize in us, and the 'ability' to act that is at play here has an essentially *normative* nature. Social recognition assigns to agents the role or place that they effectively occupy within the community, that is, some responsibilities and also some entitlements. This, by the way, motivates the claim that this notion works (only) *a bit like* 'being a speaker of a natural language'. Because in becoming a competent speaker we do not come to occupy a particular social space at all, even if such a competence makes it possible for this to happen later.

(2) The normative nature of the notion bears on the determination of the conditions that must be satisfied for attributing actions under some particular description, according to the view. Things that I do come to be my deeds, things done by me, not because they actually satisfy desires that I have or at least had while performing the actions. I recognize them as my deeds only to the extent that they satisfy norms socially applied to some of the roles that I socially play, as a matter of fact. This may sound *really* strange. Yet, it is actually the consequence of a *rationalism*

Id., *Hegel's Practical Philosophy: Rational Agency as Ethical Life*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2008, p. 41). For the compatibilist, it is possible to assert that we are free, in some sense, even if a universal determinism holds. Pippin's Hegel suggests a way to fill this negative position with some positive content. For the attribution to Hegel of a «metaphysically robust compatibilism», see J. Kreines, *Reason in the World: Hegel's Metaphysics and its Philosophical Appeal*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2015.

that permeates the whole account. For Pippin's Hegel, to do whatever we want is always to do what we have good reasons to do; and we always have good reasons, at least in principle, to act according to the expectations that correspond to the roles we socially play – husband, mother, client, land surveyor, voter, etc. – because we have voluntarily adopted or accepted them.

(3) Additionally, his Hegel defends the view that *only socially can it be decided what it is that the agent has finally done*. For instance, I may want to offend someone, but if my words deserve to have this effect is not something that I am able to determine by myself. By extension, whether I have done what I pretended, whether I have had the capacity to do it and have exercised it, is something that can only be determined through the comparison between what is socially recognized that I did and what is socially recognized that – what we may think that – I was trying to accomplish. Hegel often emphasized the competence of others in establishing the terms of this comparison and its outcome, as Pippin has pertinently shown. It is true that ordinarily everyone knows what their intention was when they got down to work. But it is more common than we may be inclined to accept that people come to know with certainty – and even this only to a certain degree – what they wanted and what they did not after they have seen what they were able to do and what effects of their behavior they find satisfactory. Free action is interpreted not as a causal-psychological course, but as the consequence of a double process of recognition: others recognize the social meaning of the efforts of the agent, while the agent recognizes the reasons that he or she had for acting like that.

(4) Finally, it is very characteristic of this view that being an agent is understood not simply as a social achievement but also as a *historical* achievement. It is the consequence of those 'struggles for recognition' that for Hegel constitute a 'phenomenology of spirit'. One of the questions that must be elucidated in the narration of these struggles is what is good about the 'good reasons to act' that we say we have, since only a society that makes good reasons to act available to its members is, it is argued, a society where someone can be and feel free. This means that this story is sup-

posed to elucidate not goodness in general, which would be a pure abstraction, but the particular ‘goodness’ that we call practical rationality. In doing so, it also clarifies what is good, from a rational point of view, about the roles we play. Pippin understands that Hegel’s work offers a ‘developmental’ argument in favor of these roles and the institutions that correspond to them. Or at least it offers a developmental argument in outline. The scheme explains at least what the historical superiority of an institution may consist in and toward what kind of reciprocity and equality before the law the struggle for recognition ultimately leads. For Pippin, Hobbes’s argument about how the state of nature gave rise to the institution of a civil authority that monopolizes the legitimate use of force paradigmatically captures the kind of pragmatic contradiction that motivates the revision of a social order and its communitarian sense of good and bad. Complementarily, the famous chapter on the dialectic of the Master and the Servant in the *Phenomenology* shows the type of instability that in practice afflicts a division of roles that ignores that the statuses are either recognized reciprocally or not recognized at all. In order to define the social and historical character of the status of agential subjectivity, that scheme seems sufficient.

This series of definitional elements of the view – its normative, rationalist, multiply recognitive, and historical profile, but especially the last of these – explains why Pippin considers Hegel’s position extremely strange, highly controversial, and unprecedented. It is, indeed, in light of his interpretation. Only a blindness of sorts to this complex of ingredients, but especially to the last one, led Richard Rorty to deny that Pippin’s Hegel adds something to the «simple-minded» view of Hume that «we are free in so far as we are aware that our peers may blame some of our deeds and projects and praise others»¹⁴.

More difficult to overcome, it seems to me, at least initially, is one of the criticisms that John McDowell has addressed to the

¹⁴ R. Rorty, *Comment on Robert Pippin’s ‘Naturalness and Mindedness: Hegel’s Compatibilism’*, «European Journal of Philosophy», VII (2), 1999, pp. 213-216, p. 215.

philosophy of action of Pippin's Hegel. It seems to McDowell that the role that Pippin attributes to social recognition in the constitution of agency is absurd, and that appreciating its absurdity will help us perceive that Hegel could not have embraced such a view. As McDowell sees it, recognition is considered by Pippin a necessary and sufficient source of the conferring of a social status. However, he is only willing to admit a constitutive a priori link between the statuses and the *possibility* of being recognized¹⁵. Exploiting the comparison with the speaker of a natural language, he proposes that we consider what it takes for the things that such a speaker writes to have meaning. According to McDowell, all that is required is that they *can* be recognized as written sentences that mean something when they are heard or read by another competent speaker. And if a catastrophe of apocalyptic proportions made all but one of the competent speakers disappear, he argues that, obviously, the sentences of this last man or woman would not immediately become meaningless, not subject to grammatical norms, and so on.

Certainly, we could give McDowell a dose of his own medicine and doubt that the doctrine of the social status of agency and action that Pippin defends has as a consequence that we have to deny the values of meaningfulness and grammaticality to the writings of the hypothetical last English speaker. To begin with, it should be remembered that social statuses are considered only somewhat similar to the status of competent speaker, as already indicated. Further, I wonder what it would be like to be a land surveyor or a janitor or, say, a philosophy professor in the bizarre scenario that the last specimen of the species inhabits (or, anyway, in the moderately bizarre scenario of total isolation that McDowell specifically imagines). In short, I cannot see that Pippin has anything to object to the emphasis placed by McDowell on the fact that the decisive element in this notion of being an agent subjected to norms should be the *possibility* of recognition, instead of immediate, current, permanent recognition.

¹⁵ J. McDowell, *Having the World in View: Essays on Kant, Hegel, and Sellars*, Cambridge (Mass.) & London, Harvard University Press, 2009, p. 169.

I mention this skeptical remark of McDowell's, however, as it helps to focus on a further element that I would like to underline, one that often goes unnoticed in Pippin's arguments, masked by the idealist rhetoric of self-constitution in which Hegel incurs no less than Kant, and that Pippin tries – I would say quite successfully – if not to domesticate, at least to civilize. Certainly, the idea that normative statuses are artificial or social constructs almost inevitably casts a shadow over the fact that a 'training' of sorts – to use Wittgenstein's term – allows those who enjoy those statuses to be recognized by others, because in fact they act in a way that invites them to do so. I believe that Pippin's insistence on that artificial character and also his claim that the statuses should not be confused with properties or capabilities suggest for a moment that, to return to an earlier example, being an agent is like being the viscera in a divinatory practice. And yet, Pippin does not think so. He pertinently points out that the state of recognition involves some kind of negative relationship with oneself, with our immediate impulses, as well as some kind of internalization of social interactions. He even talks about a 'transformation' of our nature in the process of the realization of freedom, a process that, of course, admits different degrees of progress. Furthermore, this process is also described as 'coming to hold' oneself and others to a norm or claim, even as a coming to be able to ('have come to be able to') constrain our behavior on the basis of norms. And, finally, as a training of ourselves through education, aesthetic practices, rituals, sanctions, and the like¹⁶. All of which, I think, deprives of ground the skeptical reaction that tends to be provoked by the bold thesis that one is only an agent – a particular agent – *because* one is recognized as such.

3. *An 'ontology' of subjectivity, after all*

This original view of the social-historical constitution of agency in Pippin's Hegel, with its two main elements, mutual

¹⁶ Pippin, *What is the Question for which Hegel's Theory of Recognition is the Answer?*, p. 161.

recognition of agents and individual instruction for the satisfaction of expectations (initially the expectations of others and ultimately both of others and of ourselves), is so notorious that it could easily be forgotten that Pippin's reanimation also includes a broadly Kantian account of the kind of error, namely, the *category mistake*, that would be committed if living beings like us – supposedly normal, sane adults – were not regarded as subjects, as if our behavior could only deserve 'empirical', mechanistic, non-intentional descriptions, wherein no reference to reasons for acting and ends whatsoever is made. I will now discuss this other component, which, I think, does not fit so smoothly in the social-recognition account of agency as self-training or habituation does.

Pippin's work also provides a series of statements of this component. A recent one can be found in his critical 2013 review of Slavoj Žižek's *Less than Nothing*. Pippin appreciates that Žižek's interpretation of Hegel revolves around the central question of the 'ontology' of subjectivity: What is it to be a subject that thinks, knows, acts, and interacts in a material world? But where Žižek refers to a «pre-transcendental hiatus» to make the nature and possibility of this subjectivity intelligible, Pippin thinks that we should rather invoke the essentially Kantian doctrine of the apperceptive character of all consciousness and action, a doctrine that he presents as follows:

If believing is to be conscious of believing, then it is impossible just to 'be' believing. For me to be conscious of my believing something is to be conscious of why I believe what I do (however fragmentary, confused, or unknowingly inconsistent such reasons may be). When I want to know what I believe, I am investigating what I ought to believe. Such grounds may be incomplete and may commit one to claims one is unaware of as such, and much belief is habitual and largely unreflective, but never completely so. In any case not connected or connectable with some grounds for belief, the matter would just be a view I am entertaining, not what I believe. Likewise with action. It is constitutive of action that an agent can be responsive to the 'why' question, and that means to be in a

position to give a reason for my action. [...] Doxastic, cognitive, and intentional states are thus ‘in the space of reasons’ and to ask for, say, neuropsychological causes for having come to be in that state, is to make a category mistake; to have misunderstood the question; to offer something we cannot use. Such causes are irrelevant to my having the reasons I have [...]¹⁷.

In this and similar passages two important aspects of belief and action are made explicit: first, that believing and acting imply some kind of awareness of, respectively, the believing or acting, an awareness that is not constantly explicit, nor a kind of actually accompanying awareness coordinated to the awareness of the content of the belief or the content of the action, but an awareness that the subject is always able to articulate; and, second, that such a consciousness or awareness must not be confused with the perception of an additional matter of fact, one that is different from the matter or content of the belief and from the content of the action (circumstances, means, etc.); the articulable awareness that Pippin has in mind is rather a knowledge of sorts – generally incomplete – of the reasons that we have for believing what we believe and for doing what we do.

The account is recognizably Kantian: the representation of the ‘I think’ (or, as Kant put it, the representation ‘I think’) must be able to accompany all consciousness. Though how Kantian exactly will remain a controversial issue. It also clearly relates Pippin’s Hegel to Wilfrid Sellars’s philosophy of mind and Robert Brandom’s philosophical semantics (and Brandom’s Hegel, by the way), as well as to accounts of self-knowledge that emphasize its normative constitution, like recently that of Richard Moran. All of them share the view that to attribute knowledge, opinions, intentions, or actions is to attribute commitments (both to attribute them and to assume them, actually), and, specifically, commitments to reasons. And, in that sense, to do more than offer an ‘empirical description’ of the states of a moving body. For to attribute commitments of this kind is to say what the

¹⁷ Id., *Back to Hegel?*, «Mediations», XXVI (1-2), 2013, pp. 7-28, p. 12.

object of attribution *should* do and not only what kind of object it is or what properties it has or how it is expected to behave. The question is: When is it necessary, irresistible, to attribute commitments to an object? When is it necessary to treat a featherless biped as a subject of beliefs and actions? When does a simple empirical description of his or her movements imply a category mistake? For all these authors, and certainly for Pippin, there seems to be an immediately clear case in which this is forced: the case that any one of us is for oneself. And, then, it later turns out that the objective reasons for interpreting us in this way are equally valid for interpreting the great majority of our fellows in the same manner.

The key piece of Pippin's account of the apperceptive character of consciousness and experience is the thesis that all apperception (or all apperceiving) is mediated by the subject's taking him- or herself as being apprehending (something, the world) in a specific way. It is a piece that Pippin considers Hegel has inherited from Kant and of which we find precise descriptions in Pippin's works for more than three decades. In the sense that an awareness (or experience) is the awareness (or experience) that something is the case, it is a judgment, the adoption of a belief, even if this is done hesitantly. Accordingly, whoever has an experience is someone who can attribute to him- or herself a positioning or an intentional attitude of some kind: I feel or see or notice such and such, and not anything else.

In reconstructing the Kantian version of the account, Pippin has emphasized that being in a subjective state, however momentary, can only be considered as having an experience of something, or, in other terms, as being aware of the state, inasmuch as the subject applies some determined concept to the state and judges that he or she is in a state that must be conceived by this means¹⁸. In an earlier presentation, Pippin explains the apperceptive character of 'cognitive' consciousness by saying that we

¹⁸ Id., *Hegel's Idealism*, p. 19.

must be implicitly aware of our having ‘taken’ the world as being in fact in such and such a way, although it might be different¹⁹.

We come across very similar formulations, where Pippin refers to Hegel’s heir account. In presenting it, Pippin even refers sometimes to a ‘Kantian presupposition’ of apperception, others, simply, to the reflective and self-conscious nature of all judgment and action. He then again stresses that apperception must not be confused with self-observation or with the awareness of a singular object. It means rather that every effective act of cognition contains (‘apperceptively’) a no less effective knowledge of what knowing is and implies the assumption of the presuppositions (relative to the content) of the claim involved in the knowing (the commitment to accept certain implications, reject certain contradictions, draw certain consequences, etc., etc.)²⁰. The content of apperception is, therefore, both something that is known to be done in judging and acting, generally, and the commitments that are involved in judging and acting in a certain way²¹.

Pippin associates with this reflective character of experience Hegel’s conception – his ‘idealist’ conception – of the relation between the activity of the understanding and the role of sensibility in the constitution of judgments. Of course, sensibility does a contribution, that we may call causal, in the formation of judgments, because if we did not have sensations of the things that surround us we could not be aware of them. But Pippin’s Hegel – as well as Pippin’s Fichte, by the way – thinks that we misunderstand this contribution if we think that the things we sense determine the content of our judgments (that a claim is «simply

¹⁹ Id., *Idealism as Modernism: Hegelian Variations*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1997, p. 42; the first chapter was published in 1984.

²⁰ Id., *Die Aktualität des Deutschen Idealismus*, p. 15, p. 193.

²¹ The most recent – and ample – account of this allegedly Hegelian picture of apperception is Id., *Hegel’s Realm of Shadows*, ch. 3, pp. 105 ff. There Pippin makes abundant use of Sebastian Rödl’s philosophy of self-consciousness (S. Rödl, *Self-Consciousness*, Cambridge (Mass.) et al., Harvard University Press, 2007) for explaining that judgment and the consciousness of judging are just one act, as similarly «someone’s believing something and her thought that it is something right to believe ‘are the same reality’ [*Self-consciousness*, p. 92]» (Pippin, *Hegel’s Realm of Shadows*, p. 112).

wrung out of one by a perceptual episode»²²). Judging is an implicitly rational activity. The only things that can determine that content are the reasons that we can have, and that we must seek and learn to revise, for judging the things that we are aware of. Like other readers of Hegel, Pippin interprets in this idealist spirit the argument that leads in the *Phenomenology of Spirit* from a sense certainty that is not the place of truth to the perception of things-subjects with properties-predicates (*Wahrnehmung* is the taking of the true or, as Pippin says, a taking to be true²³), and from this to the understanding and its activity of conceiving and explaining. In this context, Hegel can be read as disambiguating Kant's epistemology.

Now, what is exactly the meaning of the charge of category mistake against the attempt to account for the activity of judging or, broadly, acting in empirical or, say, naturalistic terms, in terms of efficient causes and mechanisms? What are its theoretical implications? Are they also recognizably Kantian, like the core account?

There is, arguably, a strictly Kantian version of the charge of category mistake, as far as I can see. In the solution to the Third Antinomy of the *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant defends the existence of two logically independent explanations of human action, given that we can relate actions either to past and present empirical circumstances of the agent and his or her psychological character or to the absolute spontaneity of a postulated underlying will. That is, we can adopt either a, let's say, forensic stance or, rather, a moral standpoint with regard to human action. Kant defends, as anticipated in section 1, that both are compatible. Yet, we cannot adopt both exactly at once, for obvious reasons. So, the independence of those explanations amounts to a difference in 'category'.

The problem is that, in attributing a practical reason, free will, responsiveness to the moral law, and the like, in a Kantian sense, when admitting the intelligibility and epistemic legitimacy of the intentional stance and the second kind of action explana-

²² Pippin, *Hegel's Realm of Shadows*, p. 141.

²³ Id., *Hegel's Idealism*, p. 125.

tion, we credit, in Kant's eyes, a metaphysical status to some of our powers and commit ourselves to a very peculiar causal account of freedom and spontaneity. Freedom is thereby conceived as an uncaused cause, as a power to initiate a series of events without ever commencing to act (without being in motion), through an extravagant unconditional spontaneity. And Pippin does overtly deny that Hegel subscribes to this commitment – not unexpectedly, to be sure, since, apart from its intrinsic awkwardness, this extraordinary metaphysical status cannot be, by definition, a historical achievement. Thus, Pippin cannot follow Kant in his understanding of the category mistake, as it stands.

Yet, on the other hand, the reality of the metaphysical causal status is for Kant, properly speaking, merely practical, that is, a practical implication of the standpoint of agency, deliberation, decision-making, a consequence from the fact that we act under the idea of freedom. So, after all, we might build a non-metaphysical understanding of the account, arguably Kantian in spirit. Or, at least, the chance is not unthinkable.

The category mistake might be based on the simple fact that the normative recognitive status of agents must be accounted for in normative terms internal to the practices that determine the different social roles. Using again the analogy with natural language, this internal account could be compared with the explanation of the pragmatic and semantic role of a term or expression. Although to have a phonetic apparatus capable of vocalizing – with teeth, palate, vocal chords, etc. – and a sophisticated brain to handle it in response to particular cues is required for speaking, we do not explain the linguistic role of a class of words by reference to such apparatus and some cortical regions. Even if the evolutionary natural history of both the phonetic apparatus and the brain, suitably contextualized, constituted the explanation of how we became *natural speakers*, being a *speaker of a particular language* would not be determined by a specific anatomical-functional potential, but by a special training, among speakers of that language, for the regimented use of particular voices with particular roles.

Thus, Hegel's contribution to Kant's account of apperception might consist in inflecting the thesis of the peculiarity and

irreducibility of the intentional language a social and historical twist. Actually, one true aspect of Kant's transcendental account is that apperception has no metaphysical implications or, as he puts it, no 'theoretical' implications. Therefore, we could co-opt Kant's thesis on the practical reality of human freedom and purposiveness as, precisely, the suitable frame for a non-metaphysical account, in abstraction of Kant's own metaphysical whims.

Yet, is Pippin comfortable with the theoretical *insignificance* of Kant's practical account? Should we interpret his Hegelian approach to the status of apperceptive subjectivity as having no theoretical implications? Well, I don't think so, for mainly two reasons. On the one hand, Pippin has never agreed that Kant's account has no theoretical consequences²⁴. So, if it has consequences of this kind, Hegel's appropriation of the account will arguably have them too. On the other hand, it seems that Pippin confers Hegel's *Science of Logic* a decisive role in drawing such consequences. So, given the rather obvious differences between the project of a phenomenology of spirit and the project of a science of the pure determinations of thought, it seems implausible that Hegel's Logic merely contributes a transformation of the claim of the practical indispensability of the vocabularies of the mental and the intentional into a claim on the social-historical indispensability of those vocabularies²⁵. Perhaps, Hegel's Phenomenology provides an argument for a social-historical account

²⁴ For example, in an early discussion of functionalist accounts of Kant's doctrine of transcendental apperception, including Sellars's, after quoting KrV A 803/B 831, where Kant speculates that reason and freedom could be 'nature again' (or, as Pippin puts it, «reason's practical and theoretical self-legislation or self-determination can turn out to be nature again»), Pippin reckons that «I can only plead here that [...] this is not what Kant should have said» (Pippin, *Idealism as Modernism*, p. 52).

²⁵ Pippin writes: «the self-constitution of *Geist* and its practices over time will depend on an account of the self-constitution of reason, the logic of which, involving strong claims of necessity and unavoidability, is to be provided by the *Science of Logic*. No Hegelian account of the historically achieved rationality of the structure of modern social and political institutions can dispense with such an argument» (Id., *Reconstructivism: On Honneth's Hegelianism*, p. 734).

of reason. Yet, if the *Science of Logic* makes a unique contribution to Hegel's account of agential subjectivity, it is arguably because the indispensability of the standpoint of subjectivity and agency argued for in it is more than a peculiarity of a historical form of life²⁶.

Hence, my opinion is that Pippin, always fond of the theoretical implications of apperception, celebrates that Hegel's Logic has more than a developmental story to tell regarding subjectivity and intentional vocabularies, and, as a consequence, has become prone to talk about an 'ontology' of the subject on Hegel's behalf. Although Pippin depicts Hegel's view of the status of subjectivity as having a Kantian core, he thinks it is not a merely practical, non-metaphysical account. Rather, he renders it, I believe, a not non-metaphysical account.

4. *The subject as a metaphysical artefact*

Now, this addition of an 'ontology of the subject' to a social practical account of subjectivity apparently generates a coherence issue. How can the view that being an agent means having a social status attributed by others combine with the persuasion that there is a logical argument, impervious to empirical discoveries, that proves that we are beings that can only be interpreted as animals that think, that respond to reasons, that relate to other similar beings in light of those reasons? Are the idea of category correctness and the idea of artefactual status, when applied to the same subject-agent, really amenable to merging? How can the notion of a particular status, which is relative to historically established grounds, coexist with an argument that proves a reflective character of consciousness that cannot be relativized at all? Is not the reflectivity and apperceptive character of consciousness a phenomenon that does not admit degrees, that either exists or

²⁶ On the page quoted in footnote 21, Pippin vindicates the anti-naturalist tradition of German Idealism scholars such as Dieter Henrich and Manfred Frank. I now think that he has always been attracted to a 'metaphysical' reading of Kant's doctrine of transcendental apperception.

does not exist? And, conversely, is not any social status that someone can exhibit, first of all, a status that we cannot definitively possess, one that is always provisionally conferred and only through sustained recognition, as well as one that ultimately depends on an ability to obey reasons for which there are indeed degrees?

Pippin admits at least a challenge for his general view at this crucial point²⁷. We have to account for something like the self-constitution of reason over time within a fundamental and abstract account of any possible intelligibility²⁸. Yet, he does not admit a problem of consistency in the reconstruction. In fact, he often expresses the two approaches – the social-historical account and the logical argument – one after the other, as if they were the obverse and the reverse of the same conception²⁹.

I think that for him the problem never truly arises, because the logical (metaphysical) account is actually *very dim*. If I understand him correctly, he wants the logical status to function as a mere formal or ideal or abstract condition, which only gains content, ‘actuality’, over time and by virtue of concrete relations of mutual recognition. Thus, we do not have the capabilities of an agent before we are recognized as such. To become an agent is something that can only be achieved by means of *specific* socially recognized practical statuses. This means that we are not first recognized as competent agents and thereafter attributed some social roles. We are competent agents *as* parents, teachers, supervisors, employees, advisors, close friends, and so on. Thus, we are recognized parents, teachers, supervisors, etc. and, by these means, as agents at all.

This must support the analogy between the free agent and the speaker to which Pippin resorts. Indeed, we do not become speakers *before* we learn a particular language. As we learn our mother tongue, however, we become English-speakers, or Spanish-speakers, or whatever language-speakers. Furthermore, we do not become ‘speakers’ *after* such a learning either. The ability to

²⁷ Pippin, *Reconstructivism: On Honneth’s Hegelianism*, p. 734.

²⁸ Ivi, p. 737.

²⁹ See, e.g., Id., *Hegel’s Realm of Shadows*, p. 107.

speak is rather the *abstraction* of the ability to speak a particular language. Similarly, we do not become ‘agents’ through the acquisition of social skills. Our social skills are more or less limited, so the expectations of others about us are limited too. We are recognized as reliable social agents in particular roles. The ability to act is rather the abstraction of the ability to act certain social roles.

Besides, Pippin accepts much more gradation of the logical-metaphysical status of being an agent than it initially seems. This would also lower the tension to which I refer, obviously, even if again to the detriment of the importance of the metaphysical argument. In, for instance, his cinematic philosophy, Pippin speaks of classic American film noir characters as ‘minimal’ agents who exercise a ‘weak’ intentionality. And what he characterizes in his works on Kant and Hegel, in the abstract descriptions of the reflective nature of consciousness, as a «taking oneself as doing something» is said to admit, in the not totally bizarre situations that noir films portray, all kinds of concretions full of errors, uncertainties, and genuine indeterminations. In his analysis of those films, the constitutive connection between doing something and knowing that something is done that the reflective view describes becomes an *empty* placeholder. Maybe the characters know – they still know – that they do something, but they do not know *what*. It even happens that one does not know why he or she is doing so, and not necessarily because the intentions or desires or pro-attitudes that moved him or her are in certain circumstances dubious or obscure, but because, as Pippin says, it may be that there is nothing yet to be known: it will be known only ‘in action’, in seeing the action carried out. It will be known progressively and retrospectively what it is that the ‘agent’ wanted. «We can say», Pippin writes, «that they [namely, those characters] are not deceiving themselves because they are not in any dialogue with themselves at all»³⁰. And, in paradigmatic noir

³⁰ Id., *Fatalism in American Film Noir: Some Cinematic Philosophy*, Charlottesville & London, University of Virginia Press, 2012, p. 41; compare Id., *The Philosophical Hitchcock. Vertigo and the Anxieties of Unknowingness*, Chicago & London, University of Chicago Press, 2017, p. 108.

cases, knowing ‘in action’ is not the knowing in action of the ‘ordinary’ agent that he or she acts when he or she acts, but knowing, only *after observing* the action, that something has been done, what has been done, and that one is the one who did such a thing.

Certainly, the interest that these cinematographic portraits arouse in Pippin comes partly from the fact that, precisely in situations in which events seem to develop with fatality, the characters that intervene cannot limit themselves to registering what happens. Even doing what one cannot help doing, and, in doing so, believing that one cannot help it, seems, after all, to be *doing something*. And, in fact, there are more or less noble ways of being not able to help that. Yet, Pippin himself believes that the kind of plausibility that these film narratives exploit contradicts the ‘reflective model’ of agency. The first assumption that is jeopardized in his analysis of film noir is, precisely, that agents know *in some special way* – neither by observation nor inferentially – what they are up to and why³¹. At this point, Pippin argues that only a prejudice about the reflective model leads to denying agency where the model is manifestly unsatisfactory. Thus, the model is a prejudice, if we take it to assert more than a rather empty condition or status.

Now, if the model points to a purely formal status, then Pippin overacts when he emphasizes the singularity, fundamentality and indispensability of the argument of the *Science of Logic*. If we cannot be recognized as agents in abstraction of our particular social statuses, particular social training, and particular social interactions, then there is no logical proof of the appropriateness of abstract categories like intentionality, purposiveness, self-determination, or action for describing the life of the human animal. Further, if living a human life, however fictional, does not depend on the essential implications of Kantian apperception, like the consciousness of our beliefs and intentions, and the consciousness of the reasons we really have for being committed to such beliefs and intentions, then we are

³¹ Id., *Fatalism in American Film Noir*, pp. 98-99.

even dispensed, *pace* Pippin, of a logical proof of the appropriateness of those categories³².

Thus, I infer that, after all, we cannot sustain in its literality both the social-historical account of the status of subjectivity and the logical-metaphysical account. Either we boil down the first or we dim the second. In my opinion, Pippin covertly takes the second path, as a consequence of the centrality that his non-natural concept of spirit has in his reanimation of Hegel³³. Hence, the *Science of Logic* cannot have the role of arguing for the necessity and actuality – «strong claims of necessity and unavoidability» – of thinking itself.

5. *What is the claim for which Hegel's logical-metaphysical argument is the proof?*

I am not arguing that the *Science of Logic* is really dispensable. Not at all. In fact, I agree with Pippin that Hegel developed a

³² In a sense, I agree with Richard Rorty, who did not see the necessity of a 'logic' of the historical development of freedom for a social, strictly non-metaphysical, account of freedom (Rorty, *Comment on Robert Pippin's Naturalness and Mindedness: Hegel's Compatibilism*, p. 215). Yet, I will plead in section 5 a different approach to Hegel's concept and, hence, the need after all for the argument of the *Science of Logic*, against Rorty.

³³ Žižek sees here some indecision or 'indeterminacy' on Pippin's account (S. Žižek, *Absolute Recoil: Towards a New Foundation of Dialectical Materialism*, London & New York, Verso, 2014, p. 17). Yet, he refers the indecision to the topic of the factual 'emergence' of subjectivity (ivi, pp. 19-20), and Pippin pretends to separate that emergence from the 'phenomenology of spirit' (cf. Pippin, *Back to Hegel*, p. 13). Certainly, we should grant Pippin that Hegel disregards the philosophical relevance of a «natural explanation» («eine natürliche Erklärung», GW 4, p. 352; or «eine äußerlich-wirkliche Produktion» or *natürliche Erzeugung*, GW 20, p. 229), in this sense. But I guess that radically separating those topics is like separating the Darwinian question of the origin of species from the post-Darwinian question of the origin of life. It makes sense – to a certain extent. I, therefore, sympathize with Žižek's dissatisfaction at this point. For a related to Pippin's yet different approach to this separation, also coming from the 'non-metaphysical' quarters, see R. Brandom, *Reply to Daniel Dennett's 'The Evolution of Why'?*, in *Reading Brandom: On Making It Explicit*, ed. by B. Weiss & J. Wanderer, London & New York, Routledge, 2010, pp. 305-308.

logical argument to prove that the concepts of activity, purpose, subjectivity, etc. are the adequate ones – the ‘true’ ones – for describing and explaining the behavior of ‘spiritual’ living beings like us. Further, I claim that Hegel wanted to contradict Kant in this regard. Kant was content to show in his first *Critique* that those concepts were no less true than the concepts of empirical cause and empirical effect: that both kinds of concepts are applicable to our actions. And then, in his later work, as I have said, he added an argument to secure the indispensability *in practice* of the first, and to show how, in becoming indispensable in that manner, they give actuality to themselves, an actuality that, however, Kant considers merely ‘practical’. *As a matter of fact*, Hegel was dissatisfied with the way in which Kant first introduced compatibilism – a ‘conciliation’ view – and then adopted the standpoint of the primacy of practical reason.

I grant that the social thread of Hegel’s account of the actuality of freedom – the whole topic of recognition – provides a new basis for the attachment to such a primacy: we can interpret the claim that being an agent is having achieved a certain social status as a variation on the theme ‘the primacy of practical reason’. But to the extent that Hegel made it clear that he wanted to contribute more than a variation on that theme, Pippin must be right in judging that the *Science of Logic* was conceived as a different argument in favor of a more fundamental indispensability. The task assigned to the Logic, to its argument, as just said, was to prove which of the two sets of concepts is the *true* one. In this sense, it all depends on grasping and expressing the true not as practical, but as metaphysical.

Now, the core content of that argument is, according to Pippin, the claim of Kantian apperception. Those who pretend to find ‘more’ metaphysics, more metaphysical substance, in the *Science of Logic* have not appreciated, in his opinion, the central role that the concept of apperception has in there³⁴. Yet, I have

³⁴ See Pippin, *Die Aktualität des Deutschen Idealismus*, p. 16. This is meant, of course, as a reply to many critics, such as Pinkard (T. Pinkard, *How Kantian was Hegel?*, «The Review of Metaphysics», XLIII (4), 1990, pp. 831-838, pp. 833-834), Houlgate (S. Houlgate, *The Opening of Hegel’s Logic: From Being to Infinity*.

been raising doubts above about how much an argument about apperception might contribute to our metaphysical self-interpretation. We have been led to the conclusion that *if the argument is about apperception*, it will not serve as a correction of Kant's solutions, and it will not make the social recognition account more than a 'primacy of practical reason' account.

I would finally like to dig a bit deeper into the argument of the *Science of Logic* to raise also doubts about the antecedent of that conditional judgment: neither about the conception itself nor about the coherence of Pippin's overall account, but about the claim that apperception is the content of the argument that the Logic develops with regard to categories like freedom, subjectivity, purposiveness, and self-determination. I am not arguing that Hegel's Logic is not a 'Transcendental Logic'³⁵. My claim is more specific: I will argue that, when it comes to the *actuality* of subjectivity, Hegel does not make the logical point of Kantian apperception. So, are Hegel's logical arguments about the unsatisfactory nature of the categories of substance and causality for our self-interpretation and the satisfactoriness of categories like purpose, reference-to-an-end, activity, and the like arguments that support the claim to actuality of transcendental apperception? I don't think so.

To intimate that they are not, I propose to consider, albeit briefly, three crucial transitions in the book, whose importance can hardly be overestimated. They have attracted the attention of new readers skeptical to Pippin's approach, and for good reasons. They are turning points in the argument of the *Science of Logic*, quite obviously. In fact, they are signaled in the book by an ex-

West Lafayette (Indiana), Purdue University Press, 2006, pp. 137-143), Stern (R. Stern, *Hegelian Metaphysics*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2009, pp. 50-51), or Bowman (B. Bowman, *Hegel and the Metaphysics of Absolute Negativity*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2013, pp. 108-09).

³⁵ This has been argued by others, e.g., Houlgate, Stern, or Kreines. Pippin's reply is usually that they have his position wrong (R.B. Pippin, *On Idealism: Responses to Markus Gabriel, James Kreines, Christopher Yeomans, Purushottama Bilimoria, Gene Flenady, Lorenzo Sala, and Jonathan Shabeen*, «Australasian Philosophical Review», II (4), 2018, pp. 440-457, p. 455). Fortunately, my argument does not depend on that debate.

PLICIT reference to the topic of the actuality of freedom, self-determination, the I and the like. The first is the transition, in the third section of the Doctrine of Essence, from the causality of substances through interaction (or ‘reciprocity of action’) to the Concept. The conclusion of the transition is, as Hegel argues in the Encyclopedia Logic, that «the *truth* of necessity is [...] freedom»³⁶. Accordingly, the 1816 Doctrine of the Concept treats the argument as the only true refutation of the philosophy of Spinoza (!)³⁷. The second turning point is actually a sort of recapitulation of the transition from causality to the Concept, though a recapitulation that takes the argument a step further. I mean the transition from mechanism to teleology and life in the second section («Objectivity») of the «Subjective Logic». There, Hegel explicitly addresses Kant’s antinomy of pure reason between ‘freedom and necessity’ and also the antinomy of judgment between mechanism and teleology, two antinomies that Hegel considers essentially the same. The conclusion of the section is that teleology is the truth of mechanism³⁸, and that the inner teleology of self-productive processes or systems is the truth of teleology (and, hence, of mechanism too)³⁹. The third point I would like to look at is the transition from life to cognition in the last section of the book. It is devoted to determining the contrast between life in general and life of a spiritual kind⁴⁰. In my reading, these three junctures contain the most important reasonings of Hegel in his whole work for a metaphysics of subjectivity⁴¹.

³⁶ GW 20, p. 157, § 158; cf. GW 11, p. 408.

³⁷ GW 12, p. 15.

³⁸ Ivi, p. 155.

³⁹ Ivi, p. 169.

⁴⁰ Ivi, p. 191.

⁴¹ Among the most interesting recent work on these three transitions I count Ch. Yeomans, *Freedom and Reflection: Hegel and the Logic of Agency*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2012; Kreines, *Reason in the World*; and K. Ng, *Hegel’s Concept of Life: Self-consciousness, Freedom, Logic*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2020. They equally pursue a line of interpretation of the *Science of Logic* alien to Pippin’s general assumption on the role of apperception.

Of course, I am not able here to properly discuss neither their systematic meaning nor their correct interpretation. I leave that for another occasion. Besides, I admit that they are very complicated transitions, whose understanding will remain disputable. My modest aim here is to show that the hypothesis that apperception is the key to the actuality of subjectivity is as good as blocked by some textual evidence that we can find in them.

(1) When, at the end of the second book of the *Science of Logic*, Hegel argues that the concepts of cause and effect are *inapplicable* to human behavior, he apparently does so because no particular event that happens before us seems capable of forcing us to act in a certain way⁴². Some kind of inner determination is rather essential for changes in the surroundings to cause our reaction. For instance, I need first to be hungry if the appearance of something edible must lead me to eat; otherwise, if I am previously satiated or indisposed, a new edible item will hardly elicit my response. Furthermore, I must ‘*let the cause come to its effect*’. So, in a sense, I transmute, convert – as Hegel literally puts it – the external cause in the cause of my reaction. This suggests a sort of ‘self-constitution’ of my behavior. However, no reference to apperception or consciousness is made in this context for the explanation of this self-constitution. In fact, note that Hegel does not circumscribe these considerations to human action. He takes it that the inapplicability of the categories of cause and effect also affects non-human living organisms: «But it is the *inadmissible application* of the relation of causality to *the relations of physico-organic and spiritual life* that must be noted above all»⁴³.

Moreover, the claim about that inapplicability occurs in the context of an ampler discussion of the possible sense of the assertion that a change in one ‘substance’ caused a change in another. The topic is, thus, the explanation of changes of any kind through efficient causality. The assumption that the change in the second is necessarily and sufficiently explained by the change in the first, as if this one were absolutely active and the

⁴² GW 11, p. 400.

⁴³ *Ibidem*.

second absolutely passive, seems suspect to Hegel. The constitution of the second ‘substance’ also seems a necessary ground of the causal relationship («a sheet hanging freely in the air is not penetrated by a musket ball»⁴⁴). Besides, not only the constitution of the second substance co-determines the outcome, but many external conditions («other efficient determinations»⁴⁵) must also be met for the change in the first to have some influence on the second. Therefore, to speak of events that cause other, subsequent events is always, not only when talking about living entities, to abstract from many things. It is precisely to avoid that abstraction, that the category of ‘interaction’ (*Wechselwirkung*) comes into play («In reciprocity of action [...] mechanism is now sublated»⁴⁶).

The meagre, relative explanations that natural antecedent causes are able to provide are again the topic of the first chapter of the section «Objectivity». As causes, ‘mechanical objects’ are declared *indifferent* to their effects, and if they play some causal role, it is always through an *external* determination ‘from without’⁴⁷. So, to explain a mechanical effect, we have to appeal to further mechanisms and ultimately to strictly indeterminable external conditions. This situation causes, for Hegel, the breakdown of «determinism»⁴⁸. Since we cannot isolate self-sufficient

⁴⁴ GW 11, pp. 402-403; cf. GW 12, p. 140.

⁴⁵ GW 11, p. 400.

⁴⁶ Ivi, p. 407.

⁴⁷ Interestingly, Pippin criticizes Hegel for having assumed «indifference» to be the chief characteristic of mechanism (Pippin, *Hegel's Realm of Shadows*, p. 279, n. 10). In my reading, however, the indifference of mechanical objects is a central aspect of Hegel’s ‘idealism of the finite’ (see the following footnote) and a key to the interpretation of ‘the truth of teleology’.

⁴⁸ GW 12, p. 135. Yet, as Bowman observes, «What qualifies his [Hegel’s] position as distinctively speculative is that he does not explain his pessimism or skepticism by reference to the limits of rational inquiry, but by reference to the ontological features of natural objects themselves. It is not that reason is not equal to the wealth and complexity of the natural world, but rather that nature does not measure up to the demands of reason» (Bowman, *Hegel and the Metaphysics of Absolute Negativity*, p. 143; cf. p. 153). Drawing on previous work of Nancy Cartwright on ‘laws of physics’, Bowman considers the impact of those ‘ontological features’ on the meaning of the ‘laws of nature’: «the very same appearance that manifests the law also exhibits any number of features

explanatory antecedent causes, mechanical explanations turn out to be outright untrue. Causes that pretend to be self-sufficient ('substances', precisely) are neither isolated nor really antecedent⁴⁹.

So actually, at this argumentative stage, the claim that freedom is the truth of necessity has nothing to do with the peculiarities of a logical relation between believing, being conscious of believing, and being committed to certain reasons for believing (nor between acting, being conscious of acting, and being committed to certain reasons for acting). Hegel does not even consider an application of concepts that supposedly is not appropriate in the case of sapient, apperceptive beings though it is in others, and his main point both at the end of the Doctrine of Essence and again in «Mechanism» is a very broad one that affects efficient and mechanical causes as such⁵⁰. Thus, as far as I can see, apperception, let alone mutual recognition, does not play any logical role in the argument that 'elevates' necessity to freedom, as Hegel puts it, in the *Science of Logic*.

(2) Neither does the apperceptive or reflective nature of consciousness, ordinary and practical, seem to be at stake or, otherwise, having a function in the reasoning when Hegel con-

that the law does not explain» (ivi, p. 152; he refers to GW 9, pp. 91-92). The upshot is, arguably, «pervasive underdetermination at both the macro-level [...] and the micro-level» (Bowman, *Hegel and the Metaphysics of Absolute Negativity*, p. 153). My claim is that this underdetermination (in my view, the core of the already mentioned 'idealism of the finite', one of the central themes of Bowman's reading) bears the burden of proof in the transition from causality to the Concept, i.e., «the realm of *subjectivity* or *freedom*» (GW 11, p. 409).

⁴⁹ Of course, the lack of truth does not imply a lack of 'reality', nor even a diminished reality (see Pippin, *On Idealism: Responses to Markus Gabriel, James Kreines, Christopher Yeomans, Purusbottama Bilimoria, Gene Flenady, Lorenzo Sala, and Jonathan Sbaheen*, p. 97).

⁵⁰ Actually, the relations of «*physico-organic and spiritual life*», properly speaking, do not belong to the discussion of causality and interaction at the end of the Doctrine of Essence, as Hegel very explicitly indicates: «But these relations belong to the *idea*, and will come up for discussion [only] then [*bey ihr erst zu betrachten sind*]» (GW 11, p. 401). So the «only possible refutation of Spinozism» is not based on reflections on the «*inadmissible application*» of the category of causality to biological or to spiritual life.

trasts the mechanical conception of objectivity with the teleological conception in the third chapter of «Objectivity». Rather, it is considerations about the way in which certain final effects are related to certain more immediate effects in productive processes, which make Hegel claim that some processes – not necessarily intentional – should be regarded as self-productive⁵¹. Then, Hegel argues that in case of objective self-production we must truly speak of ends and means: namely, of means that are realized ends and of ends that are also means.

Paradigmatic examples of what Hegel, in this argument, calls «subjective ends» are *needs* that are not necessarily conscious or represented⁵². We say that the spider weaves a web that it needs to catch a prey and eat, but it is capricious to impute to the spider the representation of that need, or of the value as instrument that the web will have, in order to explain why it weaves. So, the point Hegel tries to make is meant to concern (again) both non-intentional and intentional outcomes. Evidence of that is the fact that ‘action’ is never the topic of the chapter. Topics are, rather, activities, and, of course, means and ends, broadly speaking. Because of this general scope of the chapter «Teleology», Hegel tries to justify the application of teleological concepts without resorting to reflections on judgments and actions.

The upshot of «Teleology», Hegel argues, is that «inner teleology» is the truth of teleology, and, accordingly, the truth of mechanism too⁵³. Inner teleology is here understood in the Kantian sense⁵⁴. It refers, thus, to the structure and etiology of an

⁵¹ GW 12, pp. 170-171; cf. GW 12, p. 186. In the abstract terms of «Teleology», self-production (or reproduction) is rendered as a «return to itself» or «objective turning back [...] to itself». The purpose (or end) is «a cause of itself or whose effect is immediately the cause» (GW 12, p. 160), or, properly, «the concept that has come to itself in objectivity» (ivi, p. 161; cf. p. 167).

⁵² GW 20, p. 198, § 204 Anm.

⁵³ GW 12, p. 169.

⁵⁴ Ivi, p. 157; cf. p. 184. Ng builds her interpretation of the Concept, ‘speculative identity’, and self-conscious cognition on the centrality of the reception of the *Critique of Judgment* and the ‘purposiveness theme’ for Hegel’s Logic. She explicitly contrasts her overall approach to Pippin’s (Ng, *Hegel’s Concept of Life: Self-consciousness, Freedom, Logic*, p. 6, p. 10 ff., p. 36).

‘organized being’, whose parts are convenient – useful, functional – for the whole, like parts in a designed artefact, but, further, produce each other reciprocally, unlike parts in an ordinary man-made device. The point is that the reciprocal production of the parts (i.e., the ‘means’) is a sufficient objective basis for attributing to them a purpose, namely a ‘realized end’. Yet, ‘organized being’ is here an abstract concept, like any other logical thought-determination, so it is not the specific teleology of plants and animals that Hegel discusses here. If plants and animals or their ‘parts’ have a purpose, it is because they exhibit the structure of an ‘organized being’, and not conversely.

The conclusion of the chapter is, in my opinion, of paramount importance in the general argument of the *Logic*, because Hegel is reasoning that inner teleology is the truth of unqualified teleology. Inner teleology is, thus, the truth of external teleology, including the presumed teleology of desires, intentions, projects, and so on. If these have a purpose, it is again because they are part of an ‘organized being’.

Coherently, Hegel speaks of ends and even subjectivity in «Teleology» and «Life» in a sense not dependent on apperception or the purported *intrinsic* purposiveness of thinking or reasoning or deliberating. Apperception is neither the starting point of the argument at this juncture, nor a *terminus medius*, nor the conclusion.

(3) Another, probably the most promising place to look for apperception is, of course, the transition from life to knowledge in the final section on «The idea». «Life», the first chapter, is dedicated to the merely immediate objectivity of the Concept, whereas «The idea of cognition», the second chapter, deals with its non-immediate and adequate objectification⁵⁵. Arguably, «Life» is about unqualified life, whereas «The idea of cognition» addresses the abstract idea of spiritual life. In fact, the introduction to the latter makes explicit reference to Kant’s critique of rational psychology, i.e., the (modern) metaphysics of the soul. Hegel admits that his was a well-earned critique, but does not approve of the

⁵⁵ GW 12, p. 196.

path and conclusions of Kant's arguments in the first *Critique*⁵⁶. Here, apperception is finally in view, but, if anything, Kant appears as having missed the actuality and objectivity that it can have⁵⁷, and, on the other hand, it is rather the topic of the introductory remarks to the penultimate chapter of the book, not the topic of the chapter.

As in the two previous cases, I am not able here to discuss the arguments that take Hegel from «Life» to «The idea of cognition». I would just like to point out that the contrast between life in general (including, arguably, natural life) and spiritual life (in the abstract) is made in Hegel's *Logic*, quite explicitly, by reference to the different *media* of objectification of, respectively, immediate and spiritual life⁵⁸. Non-spiritual life is realized (or objectified) in mechanism, whereas spiritual life is realized in an already teleological – universal, ideal – medium or element. Spiritual life is, hence, a life raised to the power of two, built itself upon life, that is, the life of a 'second nature', namely the life of habits, institutions, artefacts – in sum, of culture («an objective world»⁵⁹). The contrast between nature and spirit is, thus, not dependent on the introduction of apperception and its presumed peculiarities⁶⁰. The transition to «The idea of cognition» is not mediated by the private life of apperception. If the objectivity of the Concept as spirit is perfectly adequate to the Concept as such is, I insist, because of that exponentiation. Further, if the life of spirit is an «imperishable *life*»⁶¹, as Hegel argues, it is because of the opportunities for self-production that this exponentiation creates.

⁵⁶ Ivi, pp. 193-194.

⁵⁷ See ivi, pp. 194-195.

⁵⁸ Ivi, p. 178, pp. 191-192.

⁵⁹ Ivi, p. 178.

⁶⁰ If I understand him, Kreines did not draw the adequate inference from «Life» in this regard in Kreines, *Reason in the World*. He read Hegel as introducing, adding, «incorporating» (ivi, p. 229; cf. p. 220) self-consciousness (a form of reflection) at this point in «The idea of cognition». I think he went too far in the attempt to combine his biological reading of the *Logic* with Pippin's (and Pinkard's) on spirit (ivi, p. 227, n. 12).

⁶¹ GW 12, p. 236.

Moreover, Hegel is also explicit that the teleology of the spiritual – cognition and action – is formally the teleology of inner ends⁶². Again, it is a circle of self-production that motivates the vocabulary of subjective ends, means-ends relations, and final causality in «The idea of cognition». Thus, the goal-directedness of cognition and action does not derive from apperception, as if apperception were a unique *intrinsic* source of purposiveness breathing life into them⁶³. I think that the lesson of the *Science of Logic* is, in this regard, that the only source of teleology is the abstract structure of a self-producing organized being, where ‘being’ means equally a natural entity, a cultural artefact, or a complete human form of life.

Nonetheless, I have acknowledged that I am not able to prove here any of these claims. I pretend only that the above reasoning and my interpretive hypothesis delineate a new challenge to Pippin’s approach. They set an agenda for further debate. I am convinced that more should be said about the role of apperception in those three turning points for Pippin’s approach to the actuality of subjectivity to be properly vindicated. If, as I believe, apperception plays no significant role in those arguments, Pippin’s account of the logic of apperception as a metaphysics of the actuality of subjectivity is rendered highly implausible. Otherwise, the relevance of those arguments for this topic is today, I think, out of question.

In Section 4, I have expressed the worry that Pippin’s understanding of Hegel’s account of subjectivity is pressed by a coherence problem. In Section 5, I have suggested that the *Science of Logic* is tasked with the development of a metaphysics of subjectivity, as Pippin rightly claims, but the task is not solved by reflecting on the apperceptive nature of judgment and action, as

⁶² Ivi, pp. 232-235.

⁶³ I, therefore, think that the assumption of an intrinsic source of teleology of spirit is deeply un-Hegelian. However, see Pippin, *Hegel’s Practical Philosophy*, p. 49 on «spirit’s own purposiveness» and *On Idealism: Responses to Markus Gabriel, James Kreines, Christopher Yeomans, Purushottama Bilimoria, Gene Flenady, Lorenzo Sala, and Jonathan Shabean*, p. 262 on the «teleologically structured attending» of reason *qua* reflective judgment.

Pippin pretends. Even if some kind of self-constitution is the end toward which everything strives in the Logic, it is a self-constitution that Hegel interprets in recognizably *biological* terms, not in Fichtean terms nor in terms of mutual recognition. I think that in his metaphysical Logic Hegel wanted to make sense of those biological terms – of ‘life’ considered in an abstract manner – and that, in doing so, he thought he had accounted for the very ‘intelligibility’ of a being for whom it is essential to be *what he or she does*, yet not simply what he or she takes to be doing.

This notwithstanding, I fully agree with Pippin that Hegel pursued to provide a distinct conception, not Kant’s, of the indispensability of concepts like teleology and subjectivity, to do so in a ‘logic’, and to discuss ‘metaphysically’ their appeal. I think that inasmuch as Pippin’s most recent work emphasizes the metaphysical status of subjectivity, he rightly fights a misunderstanding. It is a misunderstanding for him too, given that he has always been adamant that Hegel does something more in his system than to describe how we came to interpret ourselves. Pippin also deserves credit for pointing out that in his Logic Hegel offers an argument aimed to show how *true* teleological and intentional concepts are, and that this argument is not developmental or phenomenological or about the practical and ethical utility which they have. In this sense, I agree with him when he implies that the doctrine of social recognition is not the answer – not the *whole* answer – that Hegel gives to the question of the status of subjectivity.