

# The Logic of Critical Theory

Robert B. Pippin, *Hegel's Realm of Shadows: Logic as Metaphysics in The Science of Logic* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2019). 322pp., £34.00 hb., £24.00 pb., 978 0 22658 870 4 hb., 978 0 22670 341 1 pb.

In one of Lenin's most famous lines, he notes that 'it is impossible to understand Marx's *Capital* ... without having thoroughly studied and understood the *whole* of Hegel's *Logic*.' This might seem an odd starting point for a review of Robert Pippin's most recent book, a highly technical treatise that might best be understood as an explication of what Pippin regards as the *Logic's* single-most radical thesis: that logic and metaphysics 'coincide'. For Pippin, the *Logic* shows that an account of being or 'what is' (metaphysics) cannot be successful or avoid begging questions without also including an account of the intelligibility or 'thinkability' of such an account (logic). To make sense of things (the task of metaphysics according to Aristotle, one of the two heroes of the *Logic*), we must make sense of the very idea of 'sense-making', the basic forms of thought.

To put this point in the terms of one of the book's key interlocutors, Wittgenstein: if 'being' is understood as the most capacious language-game we play, then what Hegel is asking is what it would mean to give a coherent account of the rules of the game, as well as of the general notion of rule-governed games. For something to be, it must be intelligible, conceptually articulable. There are not unknowable things outside of the bounds of sense, but no things at all, only sheer nonsense.

Pippin's book provides a *tour de force* reading of the *Logic* in terms of the 'logic-as-metaphysics' thesis and the related notion of the 'apperceptive' character of thinking, a career-long preoccupation of Pippin's. He also brings Hegel's work – both the greater *Logic*, published in its final form in 1832, and its 'minor' counterpart, the *Encyclopedia Logic* (1817) – to bear on a number of current philosophical topics, including Frege's distinction between the force and intelligibility of a proposition, Wittgenstein on the limits of sense, the relationship between concept and intuition, and Aristotle and Kant on the mechanical inexplicability of living organisms. Given Pippin's rather esoteric set of concerns, the suspicion might be that *Hegel's Realm of Shadows* is the ultimate exercise in analytic scholasticism, the culmination of a

century-long process of depoliticising Hegel, and thus the polar opposite of Lenin's *Conspectus* (1929), his compiled notes for a reading of the *Logic* in the service of advancing Marx's critique of capital. Yet, despite appearances to the contrary, Pippin's book is actually one of the most important contributions to the tradition of critical theory since he began publishing in the 1970s. Aside from its evident contributions to Hegel scholarship, engaging as it does with a host of contemporary analytic idealists, from McDowell to Brandom to Houlgate to Longuenesse, *Hegel's Realm of Shadows* is also a crucial philosophical intervention in critical theory with radical implications for our understanding of social critique.

Pippin's book is divided into two parts and comprises nine chapters. The first four chapters which make up Part I establish the frame for the reading of each of the three books of the *Logic* (the *Logic of Being*, the *Logic of Essence* and the *Logic of the Concept*) undertaken in Part II. In the introductory chapter, Pippin argues for the general significance of Hegel's *Logic* by pointing to its status as the 'science of "reasons", of ways of giving reasons in rendering anything genuinely or properly intelligible'. Part of the revolution inaugurated by Kant – the other key figure for the *Logic* – lay in his famous distinction between general and transcendental logic, between the rules of thought in abstraction from objects and the rules of thought that make the experience of objects possible. Famously, Kant provides a 'transcendental deduction' meant to demonstrate the applicability of such rules – the pure categories of the understanding – to the distinctly human form of sensibility, space and time. What was supposed to be a general account of knowledge turns out to amount to no more than a rather modest account of how things appear to 'us' humans, constrained as we happen to be by these spatial and temporal forms of intuition. How things are 'in themselves' is unknowable, beyond the bounds of (our) sense. Hegel radicalises Kant (to borrow a phrase from John McDowell) by rejecting the need for such a demonstration of the world-directedness or

‘objective purport’ of the categories and by claiming that an examination of the forms of thought themselves, properly executed, will just thereby yield knowledge of the forms of things. (Pippin provides multiple discussions of how Hegel fully prosecutes what Kant merely sketches, a ‘metaphysical deduction’, throughout the book.) General logic will no longer be separable from transcendental logic, and logic and metaphysics will ‘coincide’.

Pippin begins to explain what such an examination of pure thought involves in the second and third chapters (‘Logic and Metaphysics’ and ‘The Significance of Self-Consciousness’), by turning to the deep influence exercised on the *Logic* by the Kantian notion of the unity of apperception. According to Pippin, Hegel inherits Kant’s claim that the basic unit of thought is not the concept but rather the judgement, of which concepts are possible predicates. The meaning of concepts is determined by use – by how they are used in practical and theoretical judgements. To master the concept of ‘blue’ is to know how to use it, to know to which sorts of things one can apply it (to cubes and flowers but not to gravity or love) and to know what other concepts its application excludes (red, green) or entails (coloured). All thought is apperceptive, for Kant as for Hegel, in that it is not a mere registering of perceptions, desires, beliefs, and so on, but an attentiveness to what one has *reason* to desire or believe.

The *Logic*, on Pippin’s account, is the record of thought’s apperceptive attempt to think the thought of itself, to ask the question what it means to think. The fourth chapter prepares us for the exemplification of this dialectic in Part II through an account of the self-negating, self-correcting character of any thinking – including thought’s thinking of itself (‘thinking thinking thinking’, in the Aristotelean phrase quoted several times by Pippin). In an important discussion in the penultimate section of the chapter, Pippin contrasts his own reading of Hegel with that of Robert Brandom, whose own understanding of ‘determinate negation’ in terms of ‘material incompatibility’ (something’s being reptilian specifically excludes its being mammalian) is criticised by Pippin as appropriate only to the first of the three books of the *Logic* and as insufficient to grasp the form of self-negation that functions as the moving principle of the work as a whole. As chapter five demonstrates, in trying to think the thought of pure being, thought has committed itself

to thinking something entirely indeterminate, and hence to thinking ‘nothing’ at all. Such indeterminacy is not just an indifferent fact about pure being, but a failure of thought that it must resolve, if it is to truly think being as it ought to be thought. What Brandom fails to grasp, on Pippin’s account, is the *a priori* openness of thought to its own possible negation, just by virtue of the norm-governed character of any act or belief.



Throughout the first five chapters, especially in the notes, Pippin takes great pains to correct common misunderstandings prompted by infelicitous formulations in his first path-breaking work on Hegel (*Hegel’s Idealism* (1989)), while also working to distinguish his clarified position from the ‘ontological’ reading of the *Logic* popularised by Stephen Houlgate. In brief, if for Houlgate one can infer directly from the categories of the *Logic* to how things in themselves are, then, for Pippin, the *Logic* articulates how being must be thought for things to be intelligible as what they are. This is a difficult thought and one could be forgiven for thinking that Pippin is just splitting hairs, as early reviews of the book have of-

ten suggested. But in actuality, how one comes down on this issue is a matter of absolute importance: if one does not frame Hegel's 'science of pure thinking' in terms of thought's reason-responsive attempt to think being *rightly*, as it ought to be thought, one risks assimilating Hegel to the pre-Kantian rationalist tradition – represented by Descartes, Spinoza, Leibniz and Wolff – he himself criticised and will thereby miss what is truly distinctive about the Hegelian option.

Pippin's book culminates, as the *Logic* does, in an account of the categories of Life and the True and the Good. Pippin offers a powerful defense of Hegel's account of life as a non-empirically derived, logical category, not just required heuristically by 'us', for the empirical study of nature (as Kant thought), but required by thought itself, for the full conceptual specification of possible being. Yet if there is a weak spot in *Realm of Shadows*, it is here, where Pippin mostly passes over in silence Hegel's understanding of life not just as a distinct category of judgement, but as itself the most primitive form of judgement and of practical spontaneity: living individuals strive to reproduce themselves through negotiation with an external environment in light of species-specific generic constraints.

In a remarkable passage, Hegel even notes that pain – the normative sense that one's condition is deficient and requires one to act – is the 'prerogative of living natures'. Life is thought's first attempt to specify what it means to be the kind of being that thinks; but given the apperceptive requirement underscored by Pippin, life fails as such an account, since life alone is insufficient for grasping what it means to be a living being. That will require an account of a form of life that *knows* itself to be alive, an account of the *rationally* living. In the Subjective Logic, thought's account of sense leads it to provide an account of the kinds of beings that can *make sense*, living members of a species and, eventually, members of historically evolving societies, with changing conceptions of what counts as true and what counts as good. Hegel shows, in other words, that a determinate conception of being must include an account of the kinds of historically self-realising, materially dependent living beings that

render the world intelligible. It is this 'logic' of historical and social self-actualisation that completes the *Science of Logic*, as Pippin shows us in his daring final chapter.

Pippin's book gives new meaning and urgency to Lenin's old chestnut about Hegel's *Logic* and *Capital*. As Pippin writes, 'Hegel's diagnosis of the fix we have gotten ourselves into consists in the claim that we have not properly understood how to understand ourselves and the social and natural world in which we dwell'. As he has also suggested in a recent article, written during the same period as *Realm of Shadows*, unless we 'understand what is to understand anything', we will be poorly equipped to understand our historical form of life, let alone to properly diagnose its deep, structural failings.

This reflects something of a shift in the thinking of Hegel's most important contemporary reader: in his earlier book, *Hegel's Practical Philosophy* (2008), Pippin had noted that 'Marx was right about Hegel', for whom 'the point of philosophy is to comprehend the world, not change it; and this for a simple reason that Marx never properly understood: it can't'. According to Pippin's recent work, by contrast, the point of philosophy is to change the world *by* comprehending it. Indeed, especially if we take into account Hegel's radical understanding of spirit as a higher form of life (rather than something other than or 'added to' the living), the reading of the *Science of Logic* that Pippin makes available could provide a new philosophical foundation for that other famous German science, often (and mistakenly) counterposed to idealism – a 'historical materialism'.

As Hegel demonstrates with his concept of life, the idea of a historically mutable 'life process' (what we might call a 'mode of production') is partly constitutive of any possible spiritual existence. And if we fail to grasp what it means to be spiritually alive, the *Logic* wagers, we will be unable to grasp what it means for anything to intelligibly *be* at all. Consequently, with *Hegel's Realm of Shadows*, Pippin not only makes another invaluable contribution to Hegel scholarship; he changes the world – if only a little bit – by helping us to understand how we ought to understand ourselves.

Jensen Suther