

Nature and Subjectivity: Fichte's Role in the Pippin/McDowell Debate in the Light of his neo-Kantian Reception

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I

There are many ways in which one might characterise the divergence between ›analytical‹ and ›continental‹ approaches to the practice of philosophy, which has been a stubborn feature of European (and North American) intellectual life over the past hundred years or so. But perhaps one of the most obvious would be to suggest that, whereas the continental tradition has defended the irreducible status of the human ›lifeworld‹ against the intellectual prestige and theoretical influence of the modern natural sciences, prominent currents of analytical philosophy have tended to regard the world of human experience – together with the subject of such experience – as a kind of irritant, an awkward anomaly. Indeed, analytical philosophy has expended enormous effort in trying to re-characterize this world in terms consistent with the ontology and explanatory principles of the natural sciences. Furthermore, while many analytical philosophers have deferred in this way to the scientific conception of reality, and have taken natural science – albeit in an attenuated sense – as their epistemological ideal, continental thinkers have regarded their work as requiring a *diagnostic* component. The immense cultural pressure exerted by the modern ascendancy of the natural sciences is perceived as having induced a false understanding of self and world. As Merleau-Ponty puts it, in the graceful formula which opens his essay *L'œil et l'esprit*: »La science manipule les choses, et renonce à les habiter.« (Merleau-Ponty, 1964, p. 9) Be-

cause of the power of this manipulation, it is no use countering philosophical distortions only with better arguments: the socio-historical bases of a deep alienation must be exposed.

Towards the end of the twentieth century, however, developments internal to the analytical tradition began to push some of its most eminent representatives towards a convergence with continental perspectives. In particular, a growing realization of the incapacity of scientific naturalism to account for the inherently conceptual, norm-saturated character of our experience, even at the most basic sensory level, led to a revival of interest in Kant, and his idealist successors. This turn was given additional impetus by a renewal of interest in the work of the American philosopher Wilfrid Sellars, who had made powerful – but untimely, and therefore largely neglected – criticisms of mainstream analytical epistemology in the middle years of the twentieth century.¹ In the case of some distinguished contemporary thinkers influenced by Sellars, such as John McDowell, an initial discontent with the assumptions of the analytical mainstream has led to the sketching of a historically diagnostic account of their prevalence. For example, in his most significant work to date, *Mind and World*, McDowell argues that the prestige of the modern natural sciences has led us to equate nature with the »realm of law,« thereby making it impossible to include our spontaneity, our responsiveness to reasons, with our conception of ourselves as natural beings. (See McDowell, 1994, pp. 70–72) To correct this situation, McDowell urges, we need to follow the lead of Kant in putting spontaneity and rationality back at the centre of our picture of the human self. But we also need to learn from the critical responses of Kant's immediate successors, who argued that Kant's transcendental framework leaves the human subject exiled from nature, and out of touch with what, on Kant's own criteria, must be regarded as ultimately real.

The problem, then, for McDowell, is that scientific naturalism seems to leave our cognitive experience of the world – and indeed our moral life – based on exotic capacities for which no place can be found in the culturally dominant picture of reality. As he puts it, »when nature threatens to extrude the space of reasons, philosophical worries are generated about the status of rational connections, as something we can be right or wrong

1 For Sellars's classic statement of his views on the nature of perception, and related issues, see Sellars, 1997.

about.« (McDowell, 1994, p. 79) Hence, in McDowell's view, we have to resist the »modern conception according to which something's way of being natural is its position in the realm of law.« (McDowell, 1994, p. 74) Or, to put the issue in more historical terms, we have to resist the prevalent idea that the »clear-cut understanding of the realm of law,« which is the great achievement of modern science is simply tantamount to a »new clarity about nature.« (McDowell, 1994, p. 78) Not surprisingly, then, McDowell's conviction of the irreversibility of Kant's achievement, combined with deep concern about many of its consequences, sets him on a path which in some respects retraces that of the post-Kantians of the 1790s. He terms the broad philosophical approach whose grip he wishes to break »disenchanting naturalism.« (McDowell, 1994, p. 90) Breaking its hold will allow us to see our distinctively human conceptual capacities as a culturally sustained »second nature,« rather than as separated by a transcendental gulf from the natural world – and so under constant suspicion of being metaphysically disreputable.

II

Numerous critics have expressed dissatisfaction with McDowell's strategy, however. And a good proportion of these have highlighted the fact that, while McDowell wishes to hold onto »naturalism« – in a suitably relaxed sense – he also insists on the »freedom« and »spontaneity« characteristic of the »logical space of reasons« (in Sellars's famous phrase) which human beings, as self-reflective beings, inhabit. As Christoph Halbig has put the issue, McDowell's inclusive gesture raises the question of what holds first nature and second nature together, what justifies unifying them under the general heading of »nature.« (Halbig, p. 227) For if the capacity for such activities as spontaneous reflection, rational justification, and the perception of moral value are only *developed* within »second nature,« as McDowell's favoured image of »*Bildung*« suggests, and are therefore implicit in first nature, this would lead to »an implosion of the category of first nature which would no longer be coextensive with the rule of law.« (Halbig, p. 229) Halbig's suggestion is that McDowell would be well-advised to use a more neutral basic ontological term such as »reality.« But even then, he would have to acknowledge a »two level structure within reality itself,« since certain of the objective features with which McDowell endows the

world, such as moral value, are not locatable within nature, as naturalism understands it. (Halbig, p. 230)

However, the critical response to McDowell on which I intend to focus here, and which urges similar objections, is that of another prominent representative of the ›post-analytical‹ trend in contemporary Anglo-American philosophy. It might be said that Robert Pippin's intellectual itinerary has led him to concerns similar to those of McDowell, but that he has reached them from the opposite direction, as it were. Beginning from an initial in Kant and the post-Kantian idealists, especially Hegel, Pippin's thinking has expanded into a critique of currents in European thought over the last two centuries that seek to demote or even eliminate human subjectivity, and along with it the modern ideals of freedom and autonomy. This, of course, sounds reminiscent of McDowell. But whereas McDowell's prime concern is to combat the scientism of analytical philosophy, Pippin's target, in his more historically and culturally oriented writings, is the threat to subjectivity stemming from the deconstructive and post-modern currents of continental thought. (See Pippin, 1991)

This difference of target – postmodernism on the one hand, scientism on the other – is connected with an important divergence from McDowell over how best to repel threats to our understanding of ourselves as creatures responsive to reasons. In *Mind and World*, McDowell argues that Kant made crucial advances in accounting for the way in which thought bears on reality. After Kant it is no longer possible to ignore the fact that conceptual articulation is displayed by all experience of an objective world, even when we seem to be simply registering what is before us; we must cease to imagine that raw pre-conceptual inputs could somehow function as *reasons* for our beliefs about the world, as opposed to merely ›exculpating‹ them. But, at the same time, Kant did not go far enough. ›Kant's successors,‹ McDowell suggests approvingly, ›definitively abandon the idea that our sensibility has its own autonomous a priori form, and the sharp boundary Kant places between understanding, constrained by sensibility, and unconstrained reason.‹ (McDowell, 2002, p. 273) In his view, this move represents a shift towards his own style of ›relaxed naturalism,‹ or ›naturalised Platonism.‹

For Pippin, however, this is a misunderstanding of the post-Kantian dynamic. His own response to the complex of issues regarding the relation of reason and nature is to cut the Gordian knot. He implies that there is no problem in opposing the spontaneity of thought to a nature structured by

causal laws, as long as we do not construe this opposition as an *ontological* dualism. The ›space of reasons‹ is not locked in metaphysical rivalry with the ›space of causes,‹ for it is a purely *normative* space, to which all scientifically explanatory considerations are irrelevant (although, of course, it is brought into being by the practices of natural creatures). Consequently, in the epistemological domain, Pippin rejects what he takes to be McDowell's notion that the world, insofar as it is simply *received* in perception, could function as a source of legitimation for our judgements. And in the practical domain, he denies what he takes to be McDowell's proposal that the notion of the actualization of natural human capacities could provide some kind of ethical guideline (See Pippin, 2002, pp. 69–70). On Pippin's account, in the aftermath of Kant, perception always involves »actively [...] *discriminating*,« not just a passive registration of the deliverances of the senses, just as the question of ethical normativity is a question of how there could be »a common mindedness such that our reactions to conduct that is objectionable have become so intimate and such a part of that fabric [of a form of life] that the conduct being the sort of conduct it is counts *thereby* as reason enough to condemn it.« (Pippin, 2002, p. 68) In general, Pippin contends, »the relevant image for our »always already engaged« conceptual and practical capacities in the German idealist tradition is *legislative power*, not empirical discrimination and deliberative judgement« (Pippin, 2002, p. 65). For him, »the space of reasons, as a historically constituted human practice, is autonomous, *sui generis*, not explicable in first-nature terms, not supernatural« (Pippin, 2002, p. 70). The threat of scientific naturalism does not need to be warded off by dubious, regressive challenges to the modern notion of nature as the realm of law. We can rest easy in the assurance that naturalism will never find a way of capturing, in its own language, what occurs in the space of reasons. So, whereas McDowell fears that the »extrusion« of the space of reasons from nature will result in its dismissal as nugatory, Pippin suggests, on the contrary, that it is precisely this extrusion which guarantees its radical autonomy.

III

Of prime interest to us, in this context, is the role played by Fichte's thought in bolstering Pippin's conviction that we can leave scientific nat-

uralism to its own sorry devices, without fearing any threat to the space of reasons. In his second major discussion of Fichte, which appeared as chapter three of *Hegel's Idealism*, Pippin contends that Fichte's decisive advance over Kant was to overcome latter's ambiguous clinging to the notion that there is purely sensory component of experience, consisting of passively registered inputs having an unknowable ground. Pippin wrote:

Fichte essentially combines the explicit Kantian thesis about the centrality of judgement in experience [...] with the more implicit and undeveloped Kantian claim that such judgements are apperceptive and spontaneous [...] Fichte thought it a necessary consequence of his own account of transcendental apperception that what Kant would regard as the manifold of intuitions given in experience should indeed be understood as a limitation on the subject's activity, but a limitation again taken or posited to be such a limitation by a subject. (Pippin, 1989, p. 52)

At the same time, Pippin is keen to downplay any suggestion that, for Fichte, objects are *reducible* to rule-governed representations produced by a transcendental subject. Rather, he asserts, »Fichte is explaining the consequences of the claim that *representing* an object is something that I reflexively *do*, that it is a relation I must *establish*, and he is impressed by the fact that such an activity must be spontaneous, ultimately determined by the subject, if the representing is an epistemic and not a matter-of-fact relation.« (Pippin, 1989, p. 56) In line with this interpretation, Pippin argues that the primary target of Fichte's relentless attacks on ›dogmatism‹ is not realism, but rather ›naturalism:‹ the self-positing of the ›I‹ occurs in a dimension which has no overlap with the domain of natural being.

Pippin's next major engagement of Fichte, his essay on *Fichte's Alleged One-Sided, Subjective, Psychological Idealism*, was published around a decade after *Hegel's Idealism*, and shows the influence of the resurgent Sellarsian vocabulary. The points about the role of the apperceptive spontaneity of the ›I‹ in all perception which Pippin had made in his book on Hegel are now presented in new language. Fichte, Pippin affirms, does not need to defend what he labels »the metaphysical distinctness of spontaneous mind.« (Pippin, 2000 a, p. 163) Rather, »Fichte's idealism [...] asserts the *self-sufficiency* or *autonomy* of, let us say, *the normative domain itself*, what Sellars took to calling (without actually thinking through as radically as Fichte did the implications of such an autonomy claim) ›the space of reasons‹« (Pippin, 2000 a, p. 156). In this essay, Pippin also reaffirms his opposition to any general view of Fichte which would present him as attempting

to combine a strategy for overcoming Kantian dualisms with a radicalisation of Kantian autonomy, to achieve – in the slogan of the time – a ›Spinozism of freedom.‹ As he writes, »If there is a ›monism‹ emerging in the post-Kantian philosophical world, of the kind proposed by Fichte (and that decisively influenced Hegel) it is what might be called a normative monism, a claim for the ›absolute‹ or unconditioned status of the space of reasons.« (Pippin, 2000 a, p. 164)

As this statement suggests, Pippin tends to portray Hegel's thought as the culmination of the positive line of development that flows from Kant via Fichte. Hegel's achievement is said to consist in reformulating the Kantian process of self-legislation, as a collective, historical, and continually revisable activity.² This means that there is no more place for a normative role for nature in Hegel's thought than in Fichte's: nature is simply what spirit increasingly detaches itself from – and rightly so. Indeed, for Pippin, this process of detachment, or ›extrusion‹ (to use McDowell's word), is what the development of Spirit essentially consists in. (See Pippin, 2002, pp. 68–69)

Undoubtedly, the thought of Fichte's Jena period displays many features that support such an interpretation. Most obviously, there is Fichte's tendency to contrast ›freedom,‹ on the one hand, and ›being‹ on the other. In the *Wissenschaftslehre nova methodo*, for example, he declares that »Freedom is, accordingly, the highest ground and the first CONDITION of all being and all consciousness.« (Fichte, WL nm, § 3). This implies that the subject, as pure ›agility,‹ has no *ontological* status, and hence that there can be no metaphysical rivalry between being and subjectivity. Of course, the message that Pippin takes from Fichte is only that subjectivity is immune to attempts at naturalistic reduction. He might concede that freedom is the ground and condition of all consciousness, but certainly not of all being. But we should note that even Fichte's much stronger transcendentalism soon proved unable to offer a stable solution to the problem of the relation between being and freedom, nature and subjectivity, when this problem was considered from a moral or practical point of view. For without the conviction that normative ideals can – at least, in the very long run – be realized, embodied in being, then the demands they place upon us are

2 For an ambitious interpretation of the *Phenomenology of Spirit* along these lines, see Pinkard, 1994.

likely to be rejected as futile and vain. Fichte's ›turn‹ away from his Jena transcendental philosophy, on which the seal is set by *The Vocation of Man* (1800), occurs when the existential problem raised by the deep discrepancy between (natural) being and (practical) normativity, between the ›space of law‹ and the ›space of reasons,‹ moves to the centre of his concerns. As he writes: »But is my intention always fulfilled? Does it take no more than to will the best in order to make it happen? Oh, most good resolutions are completely lost for this world, and others seem to work even against the purpose one had in mind for them. On the other hand, people's most despicable passions, their vices, and their misdeeds very often bring about the better more surely than the efforts of the righteous person, who never wants to do evil so that good may result from it.« (Fichte, BM, p. 277, VM, p. 92)

Fichte's response to this problem is the invocation of a ›faith‹ (*Glaube*) implicit in our moral response to others (which means, simply in our response to them *as* other subjects). Moral commitment exemplifies – and displays implicit confidence in – the working of an all-pervasive ›universal will,‹ which guides nature and practical reason towards their ultimate convergence. (Fichte, BM, pp. 289–298, VM, p. 103–112)

IV

One tempting response to the theme of ›rational faith,‹ which Fichte inherits from Kant, vastly extending its scope in the process, might be to dismiss it as an indication of the lingering grip of Christianity on the philosophical imagination of the Idealists. Yet this problematic cannot be so readily dismissed, as may become clearer if we compare Pippin's approach to the problem of nature and the normative with the Marburg neo-Kantianism of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, as exemplified by Heinrich Rickert. The comparison suggests itself because, for the neo-Kantians too, the exaggerated claims of metaphysical speculation could be undercut by assigning a *sui generis* status to the normative (or, in the older language, to the sphere of ›value‹). At the same time, the neo-Kantians – like contemporary ›post-Sellarsians‹ – could not return naively to Kant's way of distinguishing between different branches of reason, since they had the whole history of post-Kantian developments in view. The validity of at least some of the impulses behind post-Kantian developments had to be

acknowledged. And indeed, Rickert's general rubric for his project, *Kritik des Kritizismus*, (Rickert, 1999, p. 351) would not be an inaccurate description of post-Sellarsian endeavours.

In his centenary article on the *Atheismusstreit*, for example, published in *Kant-Studien* in 1899, Rickert proposed an interpretation of the Fichte of the late 1790s which foreshadows the recent Sellarsian emphasis on the normative structure, not just of moral consciousness, but of all cognition. For Fichte, Rickert explains, all theoretical knowledge – as well as moral commitment – is ultimately grounded in a feeling of certainty that cannot be derived from anything more ultimate. But this feeling is not simply a psychological state which may occur or fail to occur: it is an achievement of my orientation towards, my striving for truth, which is itself a moral obligation. As Rickert comments, in elucidating Fichte's fundamental thought: »All conviction is practical. ›I ought to convince myself‹. Without the will to conviction nothing is true and certain for me. Every judgement which makes a claim to truth presupposes the will to truth as the last ground of certainty. An ethical willing in the broadest sense, a willing which acknowledges the ›ought‹, is the basis not only for the ethical, but for the theoretical, thinking person.« (Rickert, 1899, p. 145)

Like the contemporary thinkers we have been considering, Rickert regards Fichte's move towards the unqualified primacy of practical reason as making possible the overcoming of the »old-fashioned doctrine of two worlds« (*alte Zweiweltenlehre*) which – although diluted by Kant – could not be entirely given up by him, since it played an essential role in his practical philosophy. As Rickert writes, »Fichte, by contrast, abandoned the split in being (*Seinsspaltung*) in every respect, so that his thinking which previously and subsequently went through transformations, is, at the time of the atheism controversy, antimetaphysical, even *positivistic*, if you will.« (Rickert, 1899, p. 156)

Fichte's breakthrough, in this account, consists in avoiding all speculation, in limiting himself to the evidence of inner and outer experience. Furthermore, his overcoming of what Rickert terms »intellectualism« – the false notion that cognition can operate independently of ›will‹ (or ›normative commitment,‹ we might say) – is declared to be the basis for a neutralization of the threat of naturalism. Rickert does not spell out this argument in any detail in the *Atheismusstreit* essay, but he seems to have in mind considerations similar to those advanced by Pippin: knowing is not just passive reception, but involves an active taking up, always structured

by in relation to norms of justification. And because this taking up must be free or spontaneous in order for the question of justification to arise at all, it cannot be accounted for in causal terms.

Yet Rickert also stresses in this relatively early essay that – for Fichte – the lack of correspondence between the value-oriented striving of the self and the apparent functioning of the world raises a profound problem of rationality, and hence of existential meaning. Fichte himself, reflecting on the *Atheismusstreit*, wrote: »if you were merely and simply will [...] then you might will in an ethical manner, and everything would be concluded [...] But you are also knowledge [...] and when you consider your willing, it will appear to you as contrary to reason (*vernunftwidrig*) when it appears pointless and without consequence.« (Fichte, PS, p. 384)

As beings capable of rational willing, we are both authors and subjects of a moral law which commands absolutely. But, as finite, natural beings we cannot help regarding our willing from the standpoint of purpose. Thus the question of the possibility of the *realisation* of morality, which for Fichte is tantamount to the realisation of freedom, cannot be excluded from the assessment of the *meaningfulness* of morality. And, as we have seen, for Fichte this has the consequence that moral willing is inherently an expression of faith in an ultimate moral world order – or, better, a moral world ordering (an *ordo ordinans*, which becomes the ›universal will‹ of *The Vocation of Man*). Specific convictions about God and his nature are symbolic elaborations of this fundamental – not even necessarily conscious – faith, which defines the existential space of religious belief.³

This pattern of argument, drawing on the post-Kantian trajectory, remains constant throughout Rickert's career. In the *Systematische Selbstdarstellung* which he published in 1934, two years before his death, he proposes, in a similar way, that »it cannot be enough for a human being to allow his free will to be determined by *values* and act accordingly, when he does not at the same time believe that his acting and willing in the world is also accompanied by real *consequences*, which correspond to the values which he wills« (Rickert, 1999, p. 400). In other words, human striving cannot be satisfied unless we are able to anticipate the overcoming of the separation of the practical and the theoretical what Rickert terms a ›unity

3 For further considerations on Fichte along these lines, see Rickert, 1924, ch. 14, pp. 201–214.

of value and reality« – a »*Wertwirklichkeit*«. But since this »value-reality« refers to a future that lies beyond our control, it cannot be regarded as an objective reality which could be known. As Rickert puts it, »If we wish to establish a positive attitude to the problems of value-reality there remains no other recourse than to *step beyond* the bounds of knowledge.« (Rickert, 1999, p. 401) And it is here that the imagery and symbolism of religion come into their own: »We believe in a metaphysical mode of being, but reject any scientific investigation of this way of being.« (Rickert, 1999, p. 402)

Rickert's thinking, I would like to suggest, can help us in evaluating Pippin's solution to the problem of nature and subjectivity. For Rickert, too, is committed to cleansing Kantianism of its dualistic implications (a commitment which stimulates his powerful interest in Fichte). While he insists on the plurality of modes of being, he also argues that this multiplicity need not be expressed in terms of a Kantian contrast between appearances and things-in-themselves. The experienced world is composed of the two discrete modes of »perceivable, sensory« and »intelligible, non-sensory« being – it includes both what is apprehended through the senses and culturally consolidated structures of meaning. But furthermore, the world of experience as a whole presupposes an experiencer – or what Rickert terms a »pro-physical subject (*prophysisches Subjekt*), which can never be thought as an object,« and which may »never be accounted ontologically as part of what is (*niemals ontologisch zu dem Seienden gerechnet werden dürfte*).« (Rickert, 1999, p. 379) Like the post-Sellarsians in general, Rickert insists that the defining feature of this subject is its responsiveness to the normative: its capacity to take up an active stance, whether positive or negative, towards values, both in the practical and in the theoretical sphere. But like Pippin in particular, he does not think the acknowledgement of such a subject commits us to the existence of some supernatural entity: the characterization »pro-physical« is clearly intended to contrast with »metaphysical.« Rickert argues that the Kantian dualism of appearance and thing-in-itself is now replaced with a contrast between »objectifiable and non-objectifiable spheres of being,« but both these spheres of being belong in the »here-and-now« (*Diesseits*). And, in a move which anticipates Pippin's take on the »virtuous« line of development of post-Kantian idealism, from individual to historical and collective self-legislation, he suggests that »if we wish to hold onto Kant's ethical principle of

autonomy, we must presuppose the we-community as a totality of free, non-objectifiable subjects.«⁴ (Rickert, 1999, p. 392)

But as we have just noted, Rickert does not assume that, once we have established the irreducibility of the subjective, our philosophical travails are at an end. Naturalism may have been shown to be toothless, but the question of how to make sense of the thought of a *sui generis* space of reasons becoming effective, being actually embodied in the law-governed natural world still remains. It might perhaps be replied that Pippin's version of Hegelianism already provides an answer to this question: the space of reasons is the space of those patterns of intersubjective recognition which sustain a functioning form of socio-historical life; and the structure of this space can be viewed as evolving over time, through a series of internally driven dialectical shifts, towards a relatively stable balance of autonomy and dependency. Pippin himself, sensibly enough, propounds an interpretation of Hegel that offers no *guarantee* of such progress; Hegel, he insists, does not seek to provide us with a »logico-metaphysical, contingency devouring *Wissenschaft* machine,« as he has so often been accused of doing. (Pippin, 1991, p. 166) But if one adopts this view, while at the same time arguing that we can delineate at least the basic structure of a rational, collectively autonomous form of social and cultural life, then the question of the meaningfulness of our obligation to strive towards this form of life – which history will not generate automatically – becomes hard to ignore.

Rickert's neo-Kantian equivalent for the »*Wissenschaft* machine« is a »theoreticism or logicism« which finds contradictions everywhere, and which »reinterprets the positive other in intellectualistic terms as something logically *Negative*.« (Rickert, 1924, p. 214) But at the same time, Rickert turns out to be rather sympathetic to the tripartite Hegelian distinction of ›subjective,‹ ›objective‹ and ›absolute‹ spirit. For he finds place for the notion of ›absolute spirit,‹ as Hegel's attempt to answer the question of the ultimate significance of our normative commitments: »subjective spirit signifies the free act of the pro-physical subject, through which it takes up a stance towards values. Objective spirit embraces the *mundus intelligibilis*, in other words, the totality of all comprehensible meaning-structures in

4 Of course, Rickert interprets our autonomy as our ability to regulate our activity in accordance with freely accepted values, and in this respect is close to McDowell's moral realism than the more radical version of self-legislation defended by Pippin.

the here and now [...] Absolute spirit, by contrast, lies beyond all experience and all science. It is the ›value-reality‹ in which we must have faith, if our taking up of a position, determined by values, is also to have a meaning from the standpoint of its consequences in the world.« (Rickert, 1999, pp. 402–403)

By contrast, Pippin – not distinguishing between ›objective‹ and ›absolute‹ spirit – suggests that »spirit is a self-imposed norm, a self-legislated realm that we institute and sustain, that exists only by being instituted and sustained.« (Pippin, 2000 b, p. 190) As this characteristic formula reveals, Pippin's interpretation downplays the extent to which the instituting »we is always already shaped by spirit, so that spirit's normative demands are more than just the ›selfimposed‹ demands (in some quasivoluntaristic sense) of the community which experiences them. Once or twice, in the ›Postscript‹ to his original critique of McDowell, Pippin alludes to »the very difficult question of the status of the requirement that we act as the free beings that we are.« (Pippin, 2005, p. 218) But he shows no inclination to pursue the question, either in terms of the source of the requirement or of its existential coherence – and this is perhaps not surprising. For he affirms that »Hegel has proposed a conception of rationality [...] that is *essentially* social and historical, rather than rule governed, or only ideally communal, or social and historical ›in application‹ only.« (Pippin, 1997, p. 126) Yet if this reading of Hegel were accurate, and if freedom and rationality are as closely intertwined as Pippin rightly assumes, then were we not to *act* like free beings, we would not in fact *be* free beings, and there would be nothing beyond our existing practices to generate the demand that we *should* become free.

To put this in another way: to accept the normative demands of any instituted set of practices, we need to have confidence – however implicit and inarticulate – that these practices are a piece of ›existing reason.‹ Either word in Hegel's phrase, *existierende Vernunft*, can bear the emphasis. For it implies *both* that our practices, while obviously the result of the course that history has taken, express a non-contingent rational content, *and* that there is always more to reason than its specific enactments, a surplus which exerts a practical pressure on us. For the majority of human beings, in Hegel's view, this confidence is expressed through their religious consciousness; and Hegel shows few inhibitions about using religious lan-

guage, in appropriate contexts, in order to articulate it.⁵ To put the point from another angle, Pippin's interpretation fails to register that the human instituting and sustaining of ›spirit‹ as the ›space of reasons‹ is, for Hegel, *answerable* to the rationality of spirit in an absolute sense (the rational process *need not* always coincide with the historical one, although we must generally trust that it does). Hence it leaves us with a deficient criterion for assessing the ethical and political adequacy of any particular social embodiment of reason, compared with another. As Alan Patten has pointed out, in his critique of Pippin: »there is a gap in the argument between the thin sense of community involved in recognizing that all reasons are ultimately social and historical in character (even the most individualistic libertarian could concede this) and the thick sense of community affirmed by Hegel« (Patten, 1999, pp. 31–32).

In view of these difficulties, it may be helpful to conclude by returning to McDowell's side of the argument. For it is clear that McDowell is willing to entertain the thought of a convergence between the objective and the subjective, between nature and the normative, which Pippin resists, and indeed is happy to acknowledge this thought as Hegel's signal contribution. In the sequel to his original debate with Pippin, McDowell defends the claim that »capacities that belong to our spontaneity [...] are actualized in intuitions« (McDowell, 2007, p. 398) with a direct appeal to Hegel: »The self-realization of the Concept is the unfolding of thought, and as such subjective. But it is equally the self-revelation of reality, and as such objective.« (McDowell, 2007, p. 402) Similarly, McDowell's essays in practical philosophy seem to imply that any up-and-running social world must be in some sense a self-revelation of the ethical, into which we need only to be appropriately inducted. Indeed, from the standpoint we have now reached, McDowell's »relaxed naturalism« can be seen as gesturing in the direction of that *Wertwirklichkeit* which Rickert portrays as the transcendent end-point of human aspiration. But at the same time, McDowell seems pay for these intimations of consonance with his quietism – his suspicion

5 A classical example is, of course, Hegel's ›Introduction' to his *Lectures on the Philosophy of World History* (Hegel, 1970, pp. 11–133). One of the drawbacks of Pippin's interpretation of Hegel, which makes an historically expanding sense of answerability for our practices take all the strain, is that it is unable to offer a coherent account of the role Hegel allots to religion.

of any teleological conception of history, however modest, and his rejection of the idea that there might be »a method, a formally describable procedure, for improving our ethical thinking.« (McDowell, 2002, p. 303) So, in a manner contrary to that of Pippin, McDowell also ends by falling short of the equilibrium which was so important to the post-Kantian Idealists – one in which an indispensable sense of fulfilment, of meaningful participation in social and historical existence, is balanced against the distress of the unfulfilled moral-political goal.

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