

Terry Pinkard. *Does History Make Sense? Hegel on the Historical Shapes of Justice*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2017. Pp. x + 272. Cloth, \$49.95.

Terry Pinkard has been a leading figure within the revival of Hegelian philosophy over the last quarter century, together with Robert Pippin articulating an innovative and influential interpretation of Hegel as the rightful successor to Kant's distinctly modern critique of "dogmatic metaphysics." In *Does History Make Sense?* he attempts the challenging task of rescuing Hegel's philosophy of history, drawing on his earlier account (in *Hegel's Naturalism: Mind, Nature, and the Final Ends of Life*, 2012) of Hegel as a kind of "modified Aristotelian naturalist," here sketched in chapter 1. Given that the picture of Hegel as an Aristotelian "conceptual realist" has been popular with *critics* of the post-Kantian interpretation, one might see this as representing a move away from the "post-Kantian" reading, but this would be a mistake. Hegel's project is here unambiguously described as "a direct descendent of Kant's *Critiques* and, more especially, Fichte's *Wissenschaftslehre*" (5).

In chapters 3 and 4, Pinkard, with characteristic lucidity and economy, sketches the trajectory of Hegel's philosophical account of history from the Greeks to the modern world, and in the enclosing chapters 2 and 5, makes a more systematic case for the underlying coherence of this project. The many failings of Hegel's execution of the project—his dismissive accounts of non-European civilizations as absorbed in nature in a childlike way, and his uncritical acceptance of Tacitus's mythical account of the descent of modern northern Europeans from the freedom-loving "*Germanen*," for example—are emphasized. Nevertheless, Pinkard is able to build a strong case for the plausibility of the underlying features of Hegel's account—the strongest of any I have encountered.

In order to appreciate the defensible infrastructure of Hegel's philosophy of history, we are referred to his, surely equally controversial, *Science of Logic*. Many might suspect this as providing the *least* promising way forward, but Pinkard treats such pessimism as premised on a fundamental misunderstanding of that work. Hegel is not trying to underpin claims for the

necessity of particular historical events with some dubious appeal to logical necessity; rather, Hegel's logic provides the fullest account of his metaphysics of subjectivity and self-consciousness—that peculiar “self-relation” that distinguishes us from other primates found in nature. Thus Hegel develops the idea of animal life, both human and non-human, in which actions have *reasons*, and not merely causes, but especially that of a particular *form* of such life, limited to humans, in which agents are able to *act on* those reasons. And not only do humans, capable of such reflectivity, attempt to make sense of their world, they attempt, reflectively, to *make sense of* their activity of *making sense*.

Pinkard's “naturalistic” take on human subjectivity draws on elements of Wilfrid Sellars's grounding of human rationality in the fact of human locatedness within normative language-games of “giving and asking for reasons.” While all primates move in space, the “self-conscious primate” is a kind of “amphibious” being “that moves in logical space” as well (14). This in turn is linked to the peculiar *temporality* of human subjectivity, Pinkard seeming to exploit parallels between modal and temporal concepts as found in Aristotle and other ancients. Humans can actualize possibilities in their self-conscious acts, but only on the basis of limiting conditions inherited from the past.

The idea of reflection on the conditions of subjectivity is Kantian, but rather than being *a priori* available, for Hegel such reflection is *always* limited by actual finite, institutionalized forms of life and culture inherited in history, and is typically precipitated by the threat of their unraveling. Thus, while somewhat like Herder, he treats particular life-forms as manifesting “concrete constellations of passions, principles and practices that fit into one order” (40), for Hegel the relations between the principles themselves and the practices actualizing them are riven with “contradictions.” In the ancient polis, for example, such contradictions existed between the idea of freedom as self-direction and the existence of slavery—contradictory because slavery was both the negation of freedom and a *necessary* condition of those institutions that give birth to it as a human end. Such contradictions bring about the unraveling of the initial unities, with successive life-forms being constructed from those remnants bestowed to them—

successors whose success is measured by the degree to which they solve the “logical” problems afflicting their predecessors.

I have touched on but one aspect of Hegel’s complex “logic” of the stuttering actualization of the “infinite end” of freedom found in history that Pinkard attempts to render intelligible as well as justify to the modern reader, a reader who (by virtue of historical conditions!) is probably more disposed to the counter-view of history as meaningless. It is a timely and important book, not only for those with an interest in the philosophy of Hegel.

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