

ROBERT PIPPIN

freedom within an insufficiently determinate institutional structure. Rather, we need socially significant and productive (and respected) work, loving relationships and genuine mutuality. A widespread acceptance of the value of free time and the public ownership of the means of production will not, I think, ensure that.



MARTIN HÄGGLUND

WHAT DOES IT mean to take up Hegel's idea of freedom today? What does it demand of us, both in the practice of philosophy and the practice of politics?

Hegel's idea of freedom articulates the most revolutionary demand possible, namely, that "no one is free until everyone is free." Moreover, Hegel's radical philosophical claim is that the idea of freedom is inseparable from material and social conditions. The idea of freedom is not abstract but must be embodied in concrete practice, which requires that we participate in institutional forms that acknowledge the freedom of everyone to lead their own lives. The freedom to lead our own lives is *not* a matter of being free to follow our supposedly natural inclinations. Rather, the freedom to lead our own lives is itself a social-historical achievement, which requires that we are *formed* as free subjects by the institutional practices through which we come to understand ourselves and our inclinations in the first place. It is impossible for any one of us to be in the realm of freedom alone. From the beginning, who we are and what we do is unintelligible without the recognition of others.

The demands of the idea of freedom are at the heart of *This Life: Secular Faith and Spiritual Freedom*, and Robert Pippin's response to the book provides an excellent opportunity to reflect on what it means to follow through on these demands. As I will seek to show, what is at stake in our exchange is whether Hegel's idea of freedom is compatible with the capitalist mode

REMARKS

of production and the measure of value it entails. No contemporary scholar has made more important contributions to our understanding of Hegel than Pippin, but his avoidance of Marx and the problem of capitalism entails that he not own up to the institutional transformations that are required for an actual free society to be possible.*

As Pippin recalls in his response—and as I outline in the book—Hegel “thought that modern Western societies were converging on a set of instructions that could both ensure concrete individuality and genuine social cooperation in mutual recognitive relations,” most notably through the advent of the modern state, the basic regulations of a market economy and institutions safeguarding the fundamental rights of freedom. For Hegel, an actual free society requires that we can recognize our commitment to the common good as the condition of possibility for our own freedom. But this is not primarily a psychological issue. The point is not to ensure that everyone as a matter of psychological fact identify with the common good. Rather, mutual recognition is a matter of creating institutional structures that allow everyone to recognize the formation and cultivation of the common good as enabling the formation and cultivation of their own freedom.

* Because I focus on the question of freedom, I will limit myself to a few remarks in response to the questions that Pippin raises regarding my notion of secular faith. To begin with, my notion of secular faith is not “on a par with” and does not depend on the contrast to religious faith. There was secular faith before there was any religious faith and there will be secular faith even if we let go of all forms of religious faith. Why? Because there is always—in all forms of commitment—a question of fidelity and betrayal. To be committed to anyone or anything is to *keep faith* with the commitment. In this fundamental sense, we all have secular faith by virtue of sustaining any commitment. Pippin questions why I use the term “faith,” but as I demonstrate in *This Life*, Hegel’s own insight concerning the form of self-consciousness can and should be understood in terms of secular faith. Contrary to what Pippin claims, I never make the case that we need to have faith *in* our commitments, which would indeed be absurd. Secular faith is not a second-order faith in our commitments, but designates the temporal dynamic *of* any commitment. There are not two steps involved here, as though I could first be committed and then decide whether or not I should keep faith with the commitment. Rather, the demand to keep faith with the commitment is built into the commitment itself, since any form of commitment is a temporal activity and needs to be maintained from the beginning. For the same reason, it is always possible that I can fail to sustain the commitment. This risk of failure is not only a negative threat but also an intrinsic part of what positively animates the commitment, since without the risk of failure there would be nothing at stake in keeping faith with the commitment. This is the basic dynamic of secular faith. Any form of commitment—any form of trying to do something and trying to be someone—can make sense only in relation to the possibility of failure, loss and death. Again, these are not two steps. I do not have to *add* a sense of fragility to my commitment. Rather, in being committed I necessarily take myself and what I care about to be fragile. This is one act, not two.

As Pippin points out, however, “virtually none of what [Hegel] thought was emerging has come to pass, and in the industrialized West, we have instead experienced cultural anomie, the emergence of an unimaginably influential media owned and directed by corporate interests with no regard for its consumers’ psychological health and many more contributions to widespread social pathologies.” Moreover, apropos the kind of education Hegel envisaged—the progressive *Bildung* that would allow us to actualize our freedom—Pippin strikingly contends that “I see no reason to believe such education ... is possible in late modernity.”

The obvious question to raise here is why Pippin thinks it has all turned out this way.

If we follow Hegel’s own logic, the failure of a form of life to be what it takes itself to be—in this case: the failure of modern social life to embody a genuine mutual recognition of our freedom—cannot be an accident or a mere failure of moral psychology but must testify to a contradiction between the avowed ideals of an institution and the actual practical form it legislates for itself. Yet, when Pippin seeks to explain why things have not turned out the way Hegel envisaged, he does not offer any account of an immanent contradiction in our institutional practices but instead has recourse to psychological notions of dissatisfaction, greed or corruption, which amount to contingent causal explanations rather than to an account of rational failure. As he asserts in a related essay, “a plague can completely erode the moral life of some community, and it can stay eroded for centuries. So can ever more frenzied and hysterical consumption, what may be the death spiral of global capitalism ... and the beginning of a centuries-long ecological catastrophe.” This analogy should give us pause. A plague is largely something that *happens to us* (a contingent disaster), whereas the spiral of capitalist production and consumption that entails ecological catastrophe is something that *we are doing to ourselves*.

As I show in *This Life*, the reason we are doing it to ourselves can be found in Hegel’s own *Philosophy of Right*, which seeks to give systematic expression to the institutional rationality of a free society. The key problem here concerns the production of wealth in civil society. Hegel assumes that an actual free society—which would embody the idea that no one is free unless all are free—is compatible with the capitalist mode of production, where

REMARKS

wage labor is the foundation of social wealth. At the same time, Hegel's own account of civil society gives us the resources to call into question this contention, particularly through his treatment of the problem of "the rabble." Hegel's notion of the rabble refers to any social group that cannot recognize the demands of society as their own. His main example is those who are left suffering from poverty by the market economy of civil society. "The poor man feels excluded and mocked by everyone," Hegel writes, "and this necessarily gives rise to an inner indignation." Importantly, Hegel notes that the disposition of the rabble can arise due to great wealth just as well as great poverty. "The rabble disposition also appears where there is wealth," he notes, and goes on to provide what sounds like a prediction of Donald Trump: "The rich man thinks that he can buy anything, because he knows himself as the power of the particularity of self-consciousness. Thus, wealth can lead to the same mockery and shamelessness that we find in the poor rabble. The disposition of the master over the slave is the same as that of the slave. . . . These two sides, poverty and wealth, thus constitute the corruption of civil society."

Now, the problem of the rabble is acute for Hegel, since he maintains that the institutional rationality of a free society requires that the production of wealth is not an end in itself but is for the sake of the well-being of each citizen. Well-being is here not merely a matter of basic sustenance, but of having the social possibilities to lead a free life that can be recognized as dignified by oneself and by those whom one recognizes in turn. The commitment to the welfare and dignity of each citizen is contradicted, however, by the dynamic of wage labor that is the condition for producing social wealth under capitalism. As Hegel points out, the market economy of civil society can provide only two possible solutions to the problem of poverty and unemployment, with both solutions being fundamentally unsatisfactory. On the one hand, the poor can be supported by charity or public-welfare provisions, but this is ultimately inadequate, since it does not allow for the social recognition of having a meaningful profession through which one contributes to one's own well-being and to the common good of the society to which one belongs. On the other hand, the livelihood of the poor can be provided by the creation of more paid employment—more wage labor—"which would increase the volume of production" in civil society. Yet, as Hegel perceptively-

ly observes, “it is precisely in overproduction and the lack of a proportionate number of consumers who are themselves productive that the evil consists, and this is merely exacerbated by the two expedients in question.”

The problem of overproduction arises when the production of commodities exceeds the purchasing power (the wages) of those who produce the commodities. Civil society is led to overproduction by trying to remedy the effects of poverty and unemployment, which in turn generates new forms of poverty and unemployment. To resolve the problem of overproduction, civil society is driven “to go beyond its own confines and look for consumers” in other nations. Far from resolving the problem, however, the international expansion of capitalist markets reproduces the problem of overproduction and the formation of a rabble on a global scale.

Thus, in a remarkable anticipation of Marx’s argument, Hegel shows that the problem of overproduction and unemployment is unavoidable as long as the production of social wealth depends on wage labor. The failure to achieve institutional rationality under capitalism is not reducible to historical or psychological contingencies, but is due to what Hegel himself concedes is a “deep defect” in the production of wealth in civil society, which prevents it from being conducive to actual social freedom. As Hegel strikingly concludes, “despite an *excess of wealth*, civil society is *not wealthy enough*—i.e. its own distinct resources are not sufficient—to prevent an excess of poverty and the formation of a rabble.”

Hegel here points the way to what I analyze as the deepest contradiction in the capitalist measure and production of wealth. What distinguishes the capitalist mode of production is wage labor for the sake of profit, which entails that socially necessary labor time becomes the essential measure of value. As a consequence, the measure of our wealth is *not* our actual capacity to produce goods and reduce socially necessary labor time. Even when the necessary labor time in our society is reduced thanks to technological innovations, we cannot democratically decide which forms of labor should be available to pursue in our expanded realm of freedom. We cannot create new occupations on the basis of what would be *important* and *meaningful* to do for ourselves and for our society, but must find occupations that are profitable on the market, since only such occupations generate a growth of value in the economy. This is why capitalism is an inherently alienating

REMARKS

social institution. To lead our lives *for the sake of profit* is self-contradictory and alienating, since the purpose of profit treats our lives as means rather than as ends in themselves.

Moreover, as I show in detail, the capitalist measure of value is inimical to the production of real social wealth, since it valorizes socially necessary labor time rather than socially available free time, requires unemployment as a structural feature, and has an inherent tendency toward destructive crises. The attendant problems of inequality, exploitation and commodification cannot even in principle be solved through the redistribution of capital wealth, since the wealth itself is produced by unequal relations of production, exploitation and commodification.

For the same reason, I hold that the best way to read Marx's work is as the continuation of Hegel's phenomenology of spirit, which demonstrates the inherent contradiction in our historical form of life. By Hegel's own lights, the dynamic of wage labor turns out to be fatal for any attempt to justify capitalism as compatible with the institutional rationality of a free society. While the social form of wage labor bears the democratic promise of freedom and equality within itself, the dynamic of wage labor ultimately makes it impossible to achieve and sustain an actual democratic state, which would enable everyone to see themselves in the institutions on which they depend and to which they contribute.

Thus, the dynamic of wage labor allows us to understand that the deepest reason things have not turned out the way Hegel envisaged is a *rational failure*. Pippin flatly denies this. In his response, he engages neither with my reading of the *Philosophy of Right* nor with my analysis of the inherent contradiction in the measure of value under capitalism. Instead, he merely asserts that it is not "plausible" that our failure to achieve institutional rationality is due to "a conception of value dependent on a capitalist economy":

For one thing, the sale of labor power measured by time is a signal feature of mid-nineteenth-century industrial capitalism, and the common values necessary to sustain modern global finance capitalism, with its armies of salaried and managerial workers, government and NGO employees and radically different class structure, do not seem to map easily onto each other, despite the still widespread oppressive conditions of factory labor.

Pippin here neglects my actual arguments concerning the form of value under capitalism. Socially necessary labor time as the measure of value is *not* restricted to “oppressive conditions of factory labor” but renders intelligible why both mid-nineteenth-century industrialism and modern global finance are forms of *capitalism*. We live in a global capitalist world because all of us depend for our survival on the social wealth generated by wage labor. In order to generate wealth through the social form of the wage relation, we must exploit labor time and consume commodities that are made for profit. The production of all our goods and services is mediated by the social form of wage labor, since even the amount of free time we have to produce goods or services for nonprofit depends on the wage we receive or the capital we have. Moreover, the production of the capital wealth that is distributed in the form of wages requires that there is a “growth” of value in the economy, which is only possible if we continue to exploit and commodify our lives for the sake of profit.

Moreover, since the generation of profit is our *collective* purpose under capitalism, which determines how we *materially* reproduce our lives, we cannot overcome its power through mere individual will or a change of the official worldview of our society. That our collective purpose is profit is not reducible to an explicit ideology, a conscious belief or a psychological disposition. Profit is our collective purpose not because of what we have to *think* but because of what we have to *do* under capitalism. We cannot maintain ourselves—cannot reproduce our lives—without the surplus value that is transformed into profit and accumulated in the form of capital that is distributed as wealth. The more we exploit and commodify our lives as well as our environment, the more wealth we have to distribute; the less we exploit and commodify our lives as well as our environment, the less wealth we have to distribute.

Under capitalism, then, our collectively determined purpose is the generation of profit, which is directly inimical to the institutional rationality of a free society. Under capitalism, all of us will tend to understand ourselves as individuals who have no intrinsic motivation to care for the common good, since we cannot see ourselves in the collective purpose of our society. Indeed, no one can see herself in the purpose of profit, since it treats our lives as means rather than as ends in themselves.

REMARKS

Accordingly, I argue that the idea of freedom demands the overcoming of capitalism and the advancement of what I call democratic socialism. On my account, the achievement of democratic socialism requires not a mere redistribution of wealth but a *reevaluation of value*. Such reevaluation concerns not only a *theoretical* but also a *practical* transformation of how we reproduce our lives, all the way from our production of goods to our education and other forms of social institutions. Rather than private ownership of the means of production, which exploits socially necessary labor time for the sake of generating capital wealth, we must own the means of production collectively, developing our technologies and producing our goods for the sake of increasing socially available free time.

In response to Pippin's concerns, three of my central points regarding democratic socialism are here worth recalling. First, my notion of socially available free time does *not* designate—as Pippin claims in his response—“mere free time” to do whatever we want “within an insufficiently determinate institutional structure.” On the contrary, I emphasize that our free time must be available in social and institutional forms because it does not concern a mere *quantity* of time. Rather, our quantity of time is inseparable from the *quality* of our free time, which requires institutions that allow us to shape, cultivate and transform our commitments in mutual recognition of our dependence on one another.

Second, collective ownership of the means of production does not mean that we are prevented from having private property in a concrete sense. We can have our own houses, our own computers, our own books and so on, in the sense that we can use them for our own ends and no one has the right to take them away from us against our will. While we can have private property in a concrete sense, however, we cannot have private property in the abstract sense that transforms property into a commodity that can be bought and sold for profit. The recognition of your property *as* your property is not based on your right to its abstract value as a commodity (or as a means for producing commodities), but on your right to its concrete specificity as valuable *to* you and as useful for you in leading *your* life.

Third, democratic socialism does not presume that we will all magically cooperate without antagonisms. We will never be absolved from the economic problem of the scarcity of resources and the fragility of social bonds.

The question of how we should live together will always be at issue and run the risk of breaking apart what binds us together. The point is not to have a society which *secures* that we cooperate in mutual recognition of the freedom of one another. To secure mutual recognition is neither possible nor desirable, since such security would eliminate our freedom. The point is rather to have a society that *enables* our cooperation in mutual recognition of the freedom of one another. Nothing can secure the actual exercise of mutual recognition, but mutual recognition can be enabled or disabled depending on the principles to which we strive to hold ourselves.

To that end, I specify the three principles of democratic socialism: the measure of wealth in terms of socially available free time, collective ownership of the means of production and the pursuit of labor from each according to her ability, to each according to her need. These principles express what the revaluation of value demands in practice. The principles of democratic socialism are not posited as an ideal that is external to the lives we lead. Rather, the principles make explicit what is implicit in the commitment to equality and freedom through which we are already trying to justify our liberal democracy and our capitalist economy. The commitment to equality demands that we pursue our labor from each according to her ability, to each according to her need; the commitment to freedom demands that we measure our wealth in terms of socially available free time; and both of these demands can be met in practice only if we own the means of production collectively, employing and developing them for the benefit of our shared lives rather than for the sake of profit.

The principles of democratic socialism are therefore the conditions of possibility for mutual recognition and institutional rationality in Hegel's sense. For our mutual recognition to be enabled rather than disabled, the purposive principles of our society must be possible to grasp in practice as being *for the sake of* both the common good and our individual ability to lead a life. To be emancipated rather than alienated we must be able to see ourselves—to recognize our own commitment to social freedom—in the purposive principles of our society. These principles must do justice to the inseparability of our material and spiritual life, to how economic questions of priority are at the heart of our exercise of freedom both individually and

REMARKS

collectively. The principles of democratic socialism designate what those principles of a free society must be.

To be sure, a set of principles does not by itself entail an effective transformation of our society. Given the power relations of capitalism under which we live, the achievement of democratic socialism can only be the result of a sustained and difficult political struggle. An indispensable part of the struggle, however, is to clarify to ourselves what is wrong with our current form of life and where we are committed to going. I am under no illusion that my account of democratic socialism is sufficient to secure that it will be achieved, but I hold the account to be necessary to orient our struggle for freedom and grasp the meaning of a truly emancipatory social revolution. The *probability* of change is not a given fact of the world that can be observed from a neutral standpoint; the probability of change is itself something that is transformed by an account that discloses the *possibility* of change in a new light.