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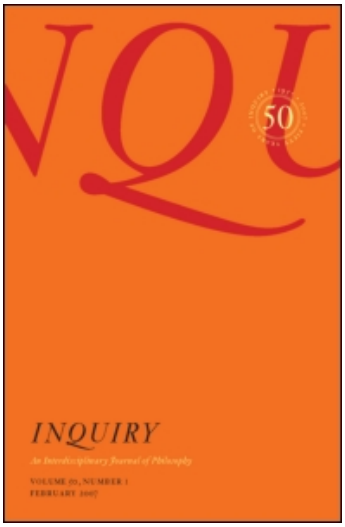

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Violence and Historical Learning: Thinking with Robert Pippin's Hegel

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Violence and Historical Learning: Thinking with Robert Pippin's Hegel

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ABSTRACT *Pippin offers his reconstruction of Hegel's account of practical reason as a point of departure for contemporary social theory, yet he does not address the implications for us of Hegel's claim that social reflection can achieve its knowledge only on the basis of a world that has already become rational. After arguing that the unreasonableness of our world can be seen from the suffering it generates, I argue that an account of violence may be a way to retrieve the promise of Hegelian insights so long as it draws in turn on existing challenges to violence and the suffering it causes. The argument discusses four kinds of violence (direct, formative, structural, and symbolic) and confronts these with a neo-Hegelian conception of social learning.*

Among the great merits of Robert Pippin's book are the ways that it shows how Hegel still speaks to questions that confront philosophers today. While carefully exploring arguments that are difficult, often contested, and sometimes surprising, Pippin retrieves ideas that not only enhance our understanding of Hegel, but offer insights that are fruitful for debates in contemporary ethics and theories of agency. Though he responds in detail to disputes among specialists in German Idealism, he also addresses a wider intellectual audience in ways that both reflect and contribute to the revival of Hegel's influence in contemporary Anglo-American thought. In so doing, his work helps erode further the stubborn divide between analytical and continental traditions. The promise of the Hegel we are given by Pippin is made all the more explicit by virtue of the erudition on which his interpretations draw. This enables him to confront persisting misconceptions of Hegel in the general literature, while drawing extensively on the contemporary scholarship on German Idealism and on the debates over practical reason in recent

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philosophy. More implicit is his orientation to social and political theory and to recent continental philosophy. This is understandable in light of his concluding suggestion that the version of Hegel he has constructed provides a useful resource for social theory, though he defers showing how to another time.

Nonetheless, it is his emphasis on the far-reaching and consistent respects in which Hegel thinks in social terms that is, for me, what is most stimulating about Pippin's book. This goes well beyond Hegel's exploration of the individual's formation within recognition relations, and concerns the reconstruction of practical reason itself. As reconstructed by Robert Pippin, the turn to social reconstruction in Hegel counts as a fundamental transition in the history of philosophy, one whose fruitfulness has by no means been exhausted by the work of subsequent philosophers. Since my paper is largely an exploration of one possible dimension of this social emphasis, let me begin by saying a few general things about Hegel's development of it.

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As Pippin makes clear, for Hegel, problems of knowledge and reason are not to be resolved philosophically prior to, or independent of, thinking about the social nature of human agents. But the concepts of social theory must be commensurable with those of the epistemological and metaphysical tradition. The introduction of what I am calling "social theory" for thinking about rationality and being takes place in Hegel in tandem with a critique of the western philosophical tradition. What results is a kind of social reflection that is much more easily identified as "philosophical" than much subsequent social theory that draws from linguistic, biological, behavioral, or cybernetic models. Without going into the complicated question of the interrelations between philosophy (Hegelian or not) and social science, let me make one observation about the implications of the way Hegel undertakes this project.

This concerns the normative content of Hegel's reconstruction of social being. In Hegel's account, not only do we see that what is rational must be understood in relation to social practices and institutions, but also that our understanding of existing practices depends on grasping how they are themselves at least potentially reasonable. For Hegel, conceiving society as a complex of practices requires conceiving it by way of actual efforts to make social existence reasonable. In fact, one can go a step further and say that, for Hegel, understanding the way the world works depends on understanding it in relation to its potential, if not existing, rational make-up. Lest one think that this suggests that social science must then become the creature of *a priori* thought, we may recall that for Hegel the owl of Minerva takes off only after the period of formative historical activity has come to an end. While a philosophically informed understanding of society can and must grasp the rational necessity of its organization, doing so is possible only in the light of historical experience, which philosophers cannot anticipate theoretically. The unique and difficult way that Hegel incorporates historical experience into philosophy thus ensures for him that there is a correspondence or

identity between what one finds in principle in the world and what emerges from a dialectical critique of the philosophical tradition.

If this is so, the implications for social science are troubling, since the possibility of social knowledge depends not just on having a notion of a reasonable society in mind, but also on living in a society that is itself reasonable in principle, or at least well on the way to becoming so. If we do not believe that our world is, at least in its general outlines, reasonable, then we are unable to have rigorous knowledge of it. This is a troubling conclusion not just for social science, but for philosophy itself. Certainly it is a problem for any conception of reason that is to be cast in social terms.

None of this brings into question Pippin's reconstruction of Hegel, though it raises concerns about his concluding suggestion that a socially minded philosophy drawing from Hegel is possible. A different, but somewhat related, point can be made about his reconstruction of what I take to be the key normative idea in the book, namely Pippin's reconstruction of Hegel's notion of freedom. Pippin draws out an intricate and careful account of Hegel's combination of a distinctive conception of normative universality with an account of recognition relations. This provides a notion of the individual's relation to social reason and freedom that stands in a complex relation to Kantian and other conceptions that become embroiled in issues of uncaused willing. Pippin offers a conception of a relation to necessity—a web of determination that transcends the individual's immediate powers and even explicit subjective understanding—that nonetheless allows for a kind of identification of the individual with the larger social process, an identification that Pippin sometimes labels an "ownership relation".[1]

The strained nature of this conception once again points us to Hegel's effort to combine social reconstruction with a philosophical framework that aspires to criticize but also to inherit the categories of the philosophical tradition. This conception seems to depend on Hegel's argument that the appropriate unification of subjectivity and objectivity can be reconstructed as a possible institutional balance and interaction of a modern market economy and a modern constitutional state. On the one hand, the state's relation to civil society enables a rational totality. On the other, the rational mediation of the two can be conceived as a matter of the understandings within the modern political system of the workings and requirements of market relations. In other words, the philosophical resolution of subject/object dualism rests on a specific complex of an agent's understanding and power in relation to a specific institutional objectivity, that of the modern economy. While it does not logically follow from this (and I do not mean to say that Pippin asserts that it does) that we can appropriately describe the result as a matter of the individual's experiencing an ownership or property relation to the resultant *political* necessities, Pippin's doing so seems in line with these Hegelian commitments. Nonetheless, the uneasiness one may feel in equating political and ethical freedom with a sense of ownership illustrates the

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difficulty of the interconnections of traditional philosophical concepts with the language of modern social institutions.

In this regard, let me note that one critic of Hegel to whom Pippin does not devote much attention, namely Marx, seems to be in a kind of agreement with Hegel regarding the recasting of philosophical categories in social terms. But there is an interesting contrast that Pippin may be ignoring when he makes what seems to be a criticism of Marx's "Eleventh Thesis on Feuerbach",[2] in which we are told that the point is to change the world, not interpret it, as philosophers have been wont to do. There Pippin tells us that Marx misses Hegel's point that philosophy is not able to be part of changing the world, but rather must wait to reflect on historical experience. While this point may be a warranted caution against the political aspirations of philosophers, it is also worth noting that Marx does not say that the point is for *philosophers* to change the world. Indeed, his remark seems in keeping with his hopes as expressed a bit earlier in the "Introduction" to the *Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right*, in which Marx speaks of transcending philosophy by realizing it.[3] On the one hand, this expresses a very Hegelian assumption that philosophical categories somehow can grasp the workings of the world in its rational possibilities. But, on the other, it also points to a different understanding of the intellectual tasks and practical role of intellectuals. I take Marx's call for transcending philosophy to be at one with his idea that practical action is required for the emergence of a reasonable world. Moreover, this is action within which intellectuals, though perhaps not contemplative philosophers, have a necessary role.

This can, of course, be dismissed as an invitation to trouble for utopian minded but practically incompetent and potentially irresponsible philosophers. But, viewed more charitably, it can be taken as a call to intellectuals to rethink their roles and responsibilities in the face of the irrationality of the world in which they live and work. It is not enough to interpret the world if we conclude there is something profoundly wrong about it. Moreover, it is not enough to rest with philosophical interpretations if it turns out that these are possible only when the world has already become reasonable.

I make this point because I think it bears directly on the sense in which one might take up Pippin's suggestion that Hegel's social approach remains fruitful. But we need a variant on Hegelian thinking that allows for the irrationality of the world we seek to understand. This in turn would be a variant that requires a very different sense of the epistemology and methodology of social theory. It may require not only a different sense of the intellectual means of thinkers, but also a different sense of their relation to the world and of the connection between their work and practical commitments to social change.

Of the many issues that can be raised on the basis of this train of thought, let me mention a couple that will figure in my suggestions for ways to develop the social emphasis that Pippin so effectively emphasizes in this

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discussion of Hegel. First is the question of where we go conceptually if we reject Hegel's specific fusion of philosophy and social theory. Without giving up on philosophical thought about society and social science, we cannot assume that so direct a relation between the language and problems of traditional philosophy on the one side and the reconstruction of social being on the other is as available to us as Hegel claims. Grasping the specificity of historical sociality presents a greater conceptual challenge than Hegel acknowledges. Marx's reliance on political economy illustrates the benefits but also the risks that come from relying more than Hegel did on the evolving knowledge of social sciences and history as one moves away from the vocabulary of the philosophical tradition. Finding a way to balance different kinds of knowledge remains a fundamental problem, one that is illustrated by the varieties of reductionist thinking that have tempted scientists and philosophers alike, whether the model is economic, linguistic, behavioral, or cybernetic. We need, I think, to appreciate Althusser's comment that we have yet really to grasp what we are talking about when we speak of society.[4] My point here is mainly a cautionary one about basic concepts as well as method.

The other issue I want to mention involves one aspect of the conceptualization we need to develop for thinking about social being, one that is very much bound up with this need simultaneously to draw from and to avoid over-reliance on traditional philosophical thinking. Here we can turn once again to the fruitfulness of Pippin's account of Hegel, since the conceptual issue I have in mind concerns how best to draw from Hegel's insight that social existence must be grasped both for how it is constituted by prior activity and also for how it itself in turn constitutes or contributes to the constitution of a world.[5] Terminology here is, of course, highly loaded, so it is risky to speak of "constitution", or of the world as simultaneously constituted and constituting. We cannot take these as more than suggestive ways of speaking. Similar cautions are in order for the alternative terminology I will use as a kind of shorthand for this complex of conceptual issues. This is the term "social reproduction". In part it draws on Marx's insights that social production is always simultaneously reproducing social relations even as it reproduces the material world, including the bodies of the producers. In his discussion of this in *The German Ideology*, he starts from biological reproduction and argues that humanity's relation to its biology is recast through evolving social action which needs to be approached through a complex notion of social labor.[6] Althusser and others have taken over this terminology from Marx, though in ways that are in turn theoretically fraught.[7] The structuralist and post-structuralist literature has the advantage of drawing further on respects in which language is self-referential and redundant.

A related notion, or a notion I want to use in a related way, is one that Habermas develops in his attempt to think about historical change in what we can call a neo-Hegelian, but non-teleological, way. This is the idea of

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social learning,[8] which addresses the respects in which social reproduction is open-ended and capable of change through the imaginative criticism of existing practices and the existing world. Learning, as Hegel himself made clear, is both a change and a preservation, an initiation and a reproduction. A developed notion of social learning would contribute to our sense of the often conflictual forms that certain kinds of change assume within processes that reproduce features of a social world. While we need to be cautious in drawing on Hegel's approach to social knowledge, I do think that his approach to these themes as reconstructed by Pippin can help us place the conceptual problem of social practices in a historical light. Social learning is an idea that may be useful in thinking about how we build a bridge from an unreasonable world to one that is more in line with what we speculatively take to be reasonable possibilities.

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Having made these perhaps overly drawn-out preliminary remarks, let me now turn to some ideas about how reflection that draws critically from Hegel can proceed within an unreasonable world, one that lacks the preconditions of Hegelian social knowledge and that demands of intellectuals something more than contemplative reconstructions.

First, how can we sustain the claim that our world is unreasonable? One could start with the profound inequality that characterizes the United States or that even more dramatically marks the global network of social relations. Not only is this a contingent and damaging fact of our society, it is one that has resulted from our evolving and ever more highly productive uses of technology whose acceleration has corresponded to a worsening of conditions for millions of individuals.[9] Or, one could start from the environmental crisis, which, like poverty, seems to pose a problem that our institutions cannot adequately address.[10] Or, again, one could start from the extent and preoccupation with political violence, which would soon draw us into themes proper to these other problems.[11] While these are all possible points of departure and each will figure in what follows, my starting point here will be somewhat more abstract, yet also perhaps more elemental. Rather than begin with a context of existing conflicts and rely on some variety of dialectical criticism, I propose to begin with the massive fact of contemporary human suffering.

Suffering operates on many levels and is impossible to measure in part because physical and psychological pain is inarticulate; suffering typically takes its toll on the capacity for language as well as thought.[12] Nonetheless, there are many indices of the suffering that accompanies the various social evils I've mentioned. These become especially dramatic in moments of crisis, but also remain a grinding reality in everyday life. In the spirit of Herbert Marcuse, I suggest that we reflect on the vagaries of sensuous experience as a telling mark of existing societies as well as a fact about existing and possible practices, even when we are drawn to the idea of freedom as providing a sweeping normative perspective. Marcuse saw in suffering an index of

unnecessary social harms as well as a spur to criticism and the exploration of alternative possibilities.[13]

Pippin notes that Hegel himself thinks along these lines:

> . . . Hegel wants to argue that in cases like the apartheid one, the unequal position of the participants can be expected to result ultimately in the normative principles involved losing their hold, creating a kind of crisis, requiring incompatible and so untenable commitments over time, that unreason manifests itself in a unique kind of human suffering, visible in examples that range from Antigone, to Rameau's nephew, to the beautiful soul.[14]

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Pippin does not speak of suffering in general, but of "a unique kind of human suffering", and cites Hegel as viewing this as a *manifestation* of a crisis that is normative in character and that is in turn set in motion by a kind of inequality. I want to focus first on the idea of suffering as a manifestation, perhaps, as a kind of symptom of problems that are to be analyzed in other terms, for example, those of a normative break-down associated with an oppressive inequality. Here suffering seems not to be so much a significant factor in the crisis, or even in the practical responses to it, as it is a sign that something profound is amiss. While I think this is an important and fruitful idea, I want to focus on the aspect of suffering that is set aside here (though not elsewhere) by Hegel.

Rather than take suffering as a manifestation of something else, we might view it as itself an effective part of a social process, for example, as a kind of punishment or even warning, or as a way victims of oppression are immobilized politically. In other words, we can also think of suffering relationally and performatively, as part of processes of what I just called social reproduction. Suffering may be constituted by existing practices, but it also figures in the ongoing evolution or persistence of social relations. While the suffering of the unemployed might under some conditions motivate their making social demands, it may just as well demoralize them and contribute to political passivity. So when we think of suffering as a manifestation or symptom, we risk neglecting an important functional dimension of specific kinds of suffering. Indeed, the tendency to treat suffering only as a manifestation or symptom, as mainly an instructive effect, is widespread in critically minded social analysis, for example in Marx and those influenced by him.

There is a certain theoretical advantage to treating suffering as a manifestation rather than as an active and functional part of a social process. Doing so can allow one to coordinate complex social phenomena around a unifying explanatory conception e.g., the self-development of spirit or the contradictory evolution of the mode of production. Nonetheless, the temptation to treat phenomena as manifestations can compromise critical social reflection in ways that have been emphasized by different social movements. Anti-racist

and feminist movements have long resisted the kind of reductive thinking that treats racism or sexism as a symptom rather than as distinctive forms of oppression and conflict. Similarly, though this is admittedly a different kind of challenge to reductive thinking, it may be important to resist treating suffering as a manifestation or symptom, not because doing so obscures a specific kind of oppression, but because it obscures a crucial way oppression works.

Moving to this more functional emphasis means locating suffering within social practices that produce and are shaped by suffering. Perhaps the most obvious, but by no means simple, way to do this is to raise the question of violence, which will be the focus of the discussion that follows. While not all suffering that is ethically significant needs to be attributed to violence, I will turn to the theme of violence as a way of thinking about some of the important ways suffering arises. Indeed, as I hope will become clear, a relational notion of violence that figures in social reproduction is a promising way to think about a range of social harms that have different relations to oppression and injustice. At the outset, we need to note that, as the correlative of much suffering, violence too has frequently been treated as a manifestation or symptom of more basic social processes. War and crime, for example, are often treated as manifestations of inequality or of the social relations of a society marked by exploitation. Focusing on the specific effectiveness of different kinds of violence does not of course rule out contextualizing them in class or other relations of inequality and conflict. But how we contextualize violence should not be limited to the ideas of a manifestation or symptom, at least until we see how an account of the specifics of violence warrants our doing so.

Arguing this way is in part to insist on avoiding a premature explanatory reductionism. By attending to the specific effectiveness of different forms of violence, we avoid premature commitments to the larger explanatory claims that totalizing or otherwise sweeping theorizations typically provide. Instead, the problem of violence may provide a more intermediate level of analysis that limits broader presuppositions and may be compatible with a variety of more general theoretical conceptions. Stressing the need to attend to the specifics of violence is also a way to attend to the problem for neo-Hegelian thought with which I began this part of the discussion, namely the problem of the unreasonableness of our world. Practices within which violence figures confront us with phenomena in which we seem to face the limits, even the destruction of reason. Thinkers have often seen the political violence of the twentieth century as invalidating the Enlightenment tradition as such. We may think in turn that what can be preserved of that tradition depends on what we can make intellectually of violence and how we can frame political responses to it. While it may not be possible to avoid normative presuppositions in reconstructing social practices, the attempt to focus theoretical attention to the specifics of violence may allow us to keep our assumptions in view and recall their fragility in our contemporary world.

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Perhaps the uncertainties presented by violence to philosophical reflection lie behind the frequent neglect of this theme by thinkers who often simply equate it with what is pre-social or pre-political, even as in some way part of a natural condition that humans have to some extent overcome, at least insofar as they enjoy what are taken to be the benefits of civilization. At the same time, provision for violence within society is often made, though typically as if violence can be instrumentalized and made the tool of the state to be directed against threats to social order, whether external or internal. While, for Hobbes, violence poses the problem to which a social compact provides the solution, once social order is achieved, that violence requires no special analysis, and neither does the mandated violence of the state, which becomes a manageable instrument.[15] Perhaps it is at least an instructive overgeneralization to say that neither the liberal nor the socialist tradition has made of violence a sustained object of analysis. For the most part, thinkers in both traditions have underplayed the extent to which violence is a relational process that figures significantly in social reproduction. My aim in what follows is mainly to indicate some of the lines along which an investigation of violence viewed in this light can be pursued.

I should begin by admitting that my overgeneralization about the liberal tradition can be exposed as such precisely by noting ways Hegel himself develops a richer sense of violence than is typical of either liberal or socialist thought. One can make a terminological distinction to draw attention to some of the ways Hegel treats violence as formative of agents. I will distinguish "formative violence" from "direct violence", where the latter concerns the familiar idea of violence as a matter of an agent acting intentionally to cause harm to someone else.

Direct violence can be enacted by groups as well as individuals and often seems to fit the instrumental model. For example, when the realist school of international relations speaks of war as the pursuit of national interests, it works with a notion of instrumental direct violence. Hegel is sometimes treated as a kind of realist, given his acceptance of war between nation states in the pursuit of national interests, not ethical goals.[16] At the same time, he seems more amenable to just war theory when it comes to the conduct of war, for example, as this affects the treatment of civilians and prisoners of war.[17] At the same time, Hegel does not restrict himself to moral constraints on war-making, since he provides a kind of ethical function for war even if there is no ethical justification for entering any particular war.

For Hegel, the ethical function of war is to deepen the bond of individuals to the social community. Individuals must be ready to sacrifice their lives for the collective good, which Hegel understands as affirming the achievement of society as a unified ethical totality and not simply as the sum of individual interests. The project of political violence has a spiritual function for Hegel, since it forges a unity and identification that is not sufficiently embodied in routine existence in modern society.[18] Here we may see a practice that figures

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in social reproduction: war for Hegel is a kind of renewal of community that possesses a higher unity than that of an organism. Perhaps paradoxically, war seems for him to contribute to that fusion of individual purposes inherent in his notion of freedom. The necessity the individual grasps as proper to one's deeper self and thus to an expression of one's freedom, a necessity that is one's own, may also require the sacrifice of the individual's life in combat.

We can speak here of "formative violence" insofar as Hegel sees this kind of direct violence as shaping agents. Unlike an instrumental conception of violence, this notion of war treats violence as a relational process that helps shape and can even consume agents within the spiritual totality of the community. Violence here is not the means to some specific end, but part of an ongoing process of formation of persons and institutions. While the outcome viewed as a matter of solidarity is served by warfare, this ethical goal is not easily separated from the means, which, in the risk and suffering of actual harms, assumes an ethical meaning. There are other examples of formative violence in Hegel, some removed from the reconstruction of historical societies, as with the Lordship/Bondage dialectic, when this is construed as a dialectic of individual self-formation. What Hegel presents here at a high level of abstraction presumably could hold in more concrete institutional settings where individuals emerge in part through the experience of a threatened violence that shakes them to their foundations.[19] In this respect, Hegel's notion of negativity seems to contain a moment of violence, even if this is subsumed by the logic of the larger spiritual process.

My claim, then, is that we can obtain a sense of violence viewed in relational and effective terms by consulting Hegel himself. The point is not that Hegel's specific analyses are adequate as they stand, but that his concerns with the relational constitution of agency and with social reproduction allow him to contribute to the reflection on violence that I have argued we need. Nonetheless, Hegel's more expansive treatment of violence still resembles traditional conceptions by containing it within a framework of social rationality to which it ultimately contributes. This is not the case with the kind of violence I have cited as indicating the unreasonableness of our actual social world.

The apologetic feature of Hegel's account of political violence is of a piece with his overestimation of the rationality of the modern state. A more critical sense of violence draws from a more skeptical sense of the potential of modern institutions. In any case, when it comes to political violence, there is little doubt that we live in a very different world than Hegel's. We can infer a dramatic historical change from the virtual disappearance of warfare between nation states, which Hegel took to be the norm. Even if we console ourselves that today's political violence is for the most part on a smaller scale than that of the first half of the twentieth century, we must also acknowledge that violence figures within a growing uncertainty about political institutions themselves. The phenomena of failed states, even failed power blocs, and the

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rise of terror networks illustrate a kind of institutional uncertainty that was alien to Hegel's sense of his relation to the historical moment.

All this makes his justification of war as conducted by the nation state of little direct relevance today, whether we accept his argument or not. Noting these changes may at the same time make us more sensitive to the complexity of the problem of violence and the evolution of institutions. Without losing sight of the interplay of agency and social practices, we need to go beyond Hegel's concern with a formative violence that ultimately figures in the emergence of free individuals within a reasonable world. The literature on structural violence confronts us with phenomena in which institutional relations and dynamics impose harms on persons in ways that damage their capacities for the freedoms that modern society seems to promise. In contexts of structural violence, the suffering caused by social action is not a matter of outcomes explicitly intended by specific agents, but rather a matter of preventable outcomes of the routine working of institutions.[20] Structural violence in this sense has arguably increased to dramatic levels since Hegel's time.

Introducing the notion of structural violence carries with it the risk of stretching the notion of violence beyond recognition. We should avoid extending the notion of violence to the point where citing it may seem a rhetorical gesture. This can happen either by over-loosening the connection between harms and responsible agency, or by over-extending the scope of the harms that count as the result of violence. Johan Galtung, a key figure in these discussions, seems to do the latter when he equates violence with injustice as such. Here what is specific to violence is lost and we are left with the same kind of insufficient differentiation of wrongs as we find in liberalism when it ignores violence as a feature of social reproduction.[21] I will try to avoid this difficulty by treating structural violence as always a matter of actual or threatened suffering, physical or psychological. In this respect, then, it resembles direct and formative violence. The other difficulty is establishing a relation between these harms and some kind of responsible agency. Structural violence is distinguished by the almost complete falling away of the intentional moment in connection with the imposition of suffering. Institutions often cause harms when no one explicitly intends them, for example, in the case of industrial accidents, or what often passes for natural disasters.

In the case of individual actions that cause suffering, the lack of the intention to harm usually keeps us from speaking of violence. This may be mitigated by considerations of carelessness or willful ignorance. Though claims of negligence do not always introduce accusations of violence, in some cases that might seem appropriate (say, in the case of a willfully indifferent parent). In the case of structural violence, I have in mind a different kind of responsibility in the absence of explicit intent, a kind of social or even political culpability. Here we are talking about ongoing social practices and about harms that are avoidable in a stronger sense than the demonstrable physical possibility that things could have gone differently. In addition to

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being able to claim that the harm was avoidable, there must be some basis for claiming that relevant agents in some way understood that the potential for harm existed and still failed to take the necessary measures to prevent it. One can think here of a factory management's refusal to slow down the pace of work or to introduce available safety measures. Or one can refer to cases in which government bodies fail to reinforce levees or refuse to establish required safety measures in the face of convincing evidence that without them an eventual storm would cause great suffering.

Structural violence occurs, then, when existing social agencies fail to prevent avoidable harms in contexts in which sufficient knowledge of probable outcomes is available. Since harms occur through the routine workings of institutions, there may be no intent on the part of any agent to impose suffering. Yet we are warranted here to speak of violence, since the workings of these institutions in their capacity to impose avoidable harms have become explicit to agents whose intervention would make a difference. Thus, in the examples I've given, it makes sense to speak of violence rather than of accidents or natural disasters. While the term "structural" implies that harms result from the workings of institutions, their specific social objectivity is not so remote from social understanding and capacity as to count as matters of blind necessity or surprising unintended consequences.

Although speaking of structure here suggests a kind of constructed social objectivity, the theme of violence can also be taken to imply that this is a conflictual form of social being. The background assumptions about knowledge and policy choices suggest conflicts of understanding, perhaps of interests, even of social groups. Thus the pace of work or presence of safety measures in a factory pits the interests of owners against those of workers, and may in turn reflect the relative strength or weakness of labor unions. Similarly, the quality of urban infrastructure results from a variety of conflicts and reflects the relative influence of the residents of different areas in a city.

Given its applicability to suffering caused by poverty or by environmental forces, the notion of structural violence has wide potential in social reconstruction and political argumentation. It also has promise as a contextualizing account for certain kinds of direct violence, for example, that of urban crime or kinds of political violence. Further, the idea of structural violence offers a rather Hegelian reflection on social practices in institutional settings where variable relations between forms of subjectivity and objectivity are an important theme. It is an idea that can be tested in different institutional settings, including, but not only, those shaped by market relations. Thus it opens as well to differential notions of agency and the distribution of agency in different institutional locations and relations.

As a conception of an unreasonable social reality, structural violence contains a normative dimension, but with a more restricted scope than one finds in Hegel. The reconstruction of harms or suffering as structural violence has an accusatory force, and challenges the prevailing understandings of social

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causality. For example, to characterize as a matter of structural violence what previously had been regarded as an industrial accident is to introduce a sense of culpability proper to an antagonistic set of social relations. For that reason, characterizing an event as a matter of structural violence builds on the insights and experiences of social movements that treat specific kinds of suffering as the result of decisions that were wrong and of policies and practices that need to be changed. Indeed, locating institutionally caused and institutionally obscured violence has long been a practice not only of the labor movement, but also the civil rights and related anti-racist movements and feminism.

Raising the issue of structural violence introduces complicated issues of social agency. These are not just problems for theoretical reconstruction, but bear on the workings and politics of violence as well. Noting how this is so introduces another conception of violence, one that overlaps with the ones we've reviewed so far, but which also introduces a distinctive set of effects and conflicts. Here we touch on the question of whether the articulation of agency might itself, under certain circumstances, be a matter of violence. This is the influential suggestion developed by Pierre Bourdieu when he speaks of symbolic violence.[22]

One context for which Bourdieu developed his term illustrates the kind of articulation of agency that can be found in many settings of power relations and conflict. He focuses on ways that women who suffer acts of direct violence tend to blame themselves rather than their male partners. The pattern of blaming the victim goes beyond self-accusation, of course, since often bystanders agree in attributing responsibility to a woman seen as having acted in some way that elicited a violent response. Symbolic violence of this kind has been studied in contexts of sexual assault as well as domestic abuse. In Bourdieu's account, this misattribution of responsibility is accompanied by simultaneous appeals to objective necessity—while the victim is culpable, the agent's direct violence results from natural drives or tendencies, which may have been stimulated by the victim. For Bourdieu, symbolic violence both misattributes culpability to the victims of violence and naturalizes the imposition of harms by appealing to objective necessities.

Though Bourdieu's account focuses on gender relations, similar dynamics can be found elsewhere, for example, the context of the industrial accidents for which the victims may be blamed for carelessness while management neglect is written off to the pressures of market competition, or the urban disaster, where the victims are treated as criminals and officials are praised for their efforts under duress in unforeseeable circumstances. The reconstruction of symbolic violence of this kind provides an understanding of an important aspect of what I have called "social reproduction", where practices figure in the reproduction of patterns of social life even as they are themselves constituted by past patterns of action and understanding. Symbolic violence contributes to the distribution of social suffering in ways that obscure effective power relations and reify social processes.

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As with structural violence, here we speak of violence without locating actions that intend specific harms. Instead, we have ongoing practices of social reflection that contribute to harms enabled by the distorted understandings and self-understandings of agents. Even if we can argue that these harms are avoidable since these practices are contingent and contestable, we seem even more at a loss than with the idea of structural violence when it comes to locating culpable agency that in some way sustains these practices. What kind of argument might we develop to justify speaking here of violence, if doing so implies some kind of responsible agency?

My background assumption here is that our ability to identify symbolic violence is part of an increased reflective awareness of the role of cultural understandings and contingent identities in sustaining oppressive social relations. But this is not just a matter of having learned more about agency, since our reflection goes in tandem with increased social attention to shaping knowledge, attitudes, emotions, motivations, and identities. The world in which we can fairly speak of symbolic violence is one in which cultural formation has become a theater of strategic action. Notions like symbolic violence may contribute to probing the latent politics of these processes.

As with structural violence, the exploration of symbolic violence involves normative commitments that presuppose and can further articulate existing conflicts e.g., feminist challenges to the conventional treatment of victims of domestic violence. By reconstructing social practices, the critics of symbolic violence can place individual acts of direct violence within a complex network of relations that may specify a variety of roles and positions, not just victims and perpetrators but bystanders of various kinds as well.

So far as symbolic violence is a form of violence, it produces harms through its effects on the ongoing pattern of social practices. If this variant of violence involves the most indirect relation to actual suffering of the variants we've traced, it does so by figuring most comprehensively in the articulation of agency itself. Reconstructing symbolic violence poses the most reflexive relation to the problem of nonviolence, but that is not to say that symbolic violence is somehow the most significant or deepest form of violence, if by that one means that it plays a foundational role for which the other variants are at least sometimes simply manifestations or effects. Indeed at this level of analysis, we are not in a position to make any particular claims about the intersection of these types of violence, though it seems clear enough that these intersections are numerous and complex. The point on which I want to conclude this admittedly speculative discussion returns to the theme of the unreasonableness of the suffering that results.

My discussion began from what I understand to be Hegel's view that adequate knowledge of the social world requires that we live in a world that is at least potentially reasonable. A concrete account of a reasonable society must draw on the historical experience in which this society has come into being, and our knowledge of how society actually works is inseparable from our

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knowledge of how it should work. We need to understand the world as an interconnected complex of individuals in social practices and institutions that make it possible for all to be free. As knowledge about a community of rational agents, our account of society must contain a normative as well as a reconstructive dimension. Even though Hegel seems to believe that the account of such a world can be conceptually rooted in a critical reconstruction of the philosophical tradition, he also insists that the portrait of this world is possible only on the basis of historical experience. While his resulting mix of philosophy and historically based social analysis is open to challenge in many respects, it is also an endlessly fascinating project for those who want to preserve an irreducible place in reflection on society for rational agency.

Thus, if in fact we live in an unreasonable world, and for that reason alone cannot pursue the Hegelian project in the strict sense, it does not follow that we should easily be tempted to abandon features of that project. Pippin's suggestion that we pursue Hegel's linkage of philosophy and social theory remains enticing. But it seems unlikely that anything like an Hegelian notion of practical reason is available to us. For the reasons just given, this is as much a comment about our world as it is about intellectual options for philosophers. Indeed, if my argument is sound, philosophers find themselves in a position in which they cannot provide the kind of theory that depends on their living in the culmination of something like Hegel's idea of the modern social project. They are certainly not in a position to interpret historical experience as providing the outlines of a reasonable world in which the individual can find some kind of identification with the expectations and accomplishments of the institutions and practices in which she finds herself.

Instead, the philosopher occupies a world that, among other things, confronts her with unreasonable levels of suffering along with the various kinds of violence that brings it about. Rather than standing in a contemplative relation to the accomplishment of a reasonable world, the philosopher may well occupy an institutional position that is implicated in prevailing unreasonable practices, even in the production of unnecessary suffering and the obscuring of avoidable violence. Rather than being able to provide an intellectual consolidation of the rational achievements of the age, the philosopher may need instead to foster a possible, but threatened, process of social learning that takes place within many contexts of conflict and structural uncertainty.

To say this is certainly to acknowledge a normative commitment implicit in the sort of mediate level of analysis I have been sketching in this paper. To speak of ours as an unreasonable world must be more than rhetoric, yet how do we articulate the elusive relation to historical reason? While much can, and has, been said on this topic, let me close with yet another insufficiently developed idea. If philosophers cannot reconstruct the outlines of a reasonable world on the basis of the modern world we inherit, that does not mean they cannot reconstruct, and even participate in, kinds of social learning that

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are taking place in our world. Themes from our discussion of structural and symbolic violence may be helpful for seeing how this might be so.

First, let me note that, by hypothesis, the unreasonableness of our world deprives us of normative reliance on a notion of community, at least if this is anything more than something like a Kantian abstraction. Habermas may be right that communication presupposes some counterfactual ideal of consensus,[23] but that does not get us very far in thinking about concrete forms of social universality. On the other hand, it does not follow that one should then agree with those like Laclau and Mouffe,[24] who emphasize the agonistic dimension, and put conflict before community or consensus. An emphasis on violence, I have argued here, does indeed bring conflict into the picture in a way that cuts more deeply than Hegelian practical reason accommodates. But it seems to me that one of the lessons of accounts of structural and symbolic violence (as well as of the vagaries of Laclau's notion of populist reason for that matter),[25] is that existing forms of agency cannot easily be reconstructed in exclusively conflictual terms. The tangle in which contemporary agency is caught is more complex than can be captured in terms of conflict relations, no matter how many conflicts are brought into the picture. For example, the problem of structural violence in the workplace can certainly be reconstructed so as to emphasize the conflict of interests as well as the more direct political conflict of capitalists and workers. But unless we simply assume that this conflict is foundational, we must acknowledge that the actual distribution and experience of harms follows from a far more complicated process on virtually every level—institutional, cultural, and psychological.

In addition to conflict, there are the shared structures within which conflict becomes possible. And institutional organization itself depends on something that is also presupposed in conflict, namely a background of normative understandings in whose terms ongoing conduct as well as conflict typically takes place. Noting this is one way to draw on the notion of social reproduction (or on the "constituting-constituted" quality of social practices) to which I referred earlier in this discussion. Informed by such a conception, we can approach the idea of social learning as something in which conflict may draw out new possibilities inherent in previous practices and normative commitments. Reconstructing harms produced in the workplace as structural violence over which conflict in turn might be treated as class conflict in effect posits and perhaps even contributes to a kind of social learning if it informs the evolution of understandings and practices that themselves confirm or validate these understandings. This might happen, for example, through workplace harms being grasped as violations of modern understandings of respect for persons where these violations in turn are motivated by institutional pressures for profit. If the systemic character of such violence warrants our speaking of an unreasonable world, the background possibilities (sustained by actual practices) for social learning about such violence allows us to maintain a critical role for intellectuals.

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In this case, the class conflict hypothesis remains precisely a hypothesis absent the kind of social learning that would animate it in historical experience. My claim here is not mainly about class analysis, but about the kind of learning that can take place concerning the violence that undermines claims regarding the reasonableness of our world. Other examples beyond workplace violence are available: in recent years these have emerged in the aftermath of mass genocidal violence, but also in challenges to violence against racial minorities, women, or sexual minorities, and other contexts in which social movements have been active. Genocidal violence is a telling example insofar as such public processes as truth and reconciliation commissions have tried to reconstruct these experiences and to bring out their preconditions and the responsibilities of the agents involved in them.[26] These are but one instance of different ways the problem of remembering has come to the fore in recent times. Frequently, remembering is tied to reconstructing past agency and locating different modes of responsibility. This is often not simply a matter of locating the authors of atrocious acts, but rather of interrogating forms of complicity proper to a wider circle of agents, including so-called bystanders.

Recent years have also witnessed numerous attempts to rethink the dynamics of interpersonal and intergroup conflicts with ideas of mediation and nonviolent reorganization of conflict. No doubt, such efforts seem a long way from providing solutions to the conflicts that either explode in dramatic moments of direct violence or routinely repeat themselves in a daily distribution of harms suffered in private. Yet not only has the problem of violence received growing attention, but we can also note the emergence of a distinctive if fragile normative discourse that has accompanied the politics of confronting violence on many levels.

This is the discourse of human rights. When understood as the assertion of timeless universal principles, human rights seem at odds with Hegelian ethical thinking, with its insistence on a historical concreteness that requires attention to specific practices and institutional frameworks. But an unorthodox Hegelian reflection might also explore the institutional and practical embodiment of human rights politics, particularly in its relation to the violence of political crisis in a world in which the nation state's position as the ultimate political entity is no longer self-evident. In recent years, human rights have figured not only in politics confronting political violence, but also in the politics of poverty and environment, in which issues of historically possible forms of agency and experience have come to the fore. Perhaps the actual and possible social learning associated with the discourse of human rights bears reflection contributing to the kind of intellectual and practical initiatives needed to explore the structural and symbolic functioning of violence. Paradoxically, what looks on the surface more like Kantian abstraction than a Hegelian ethic, might nonetheless figure in a reflection that could retrieve for contemporary practical reason some of the Hegelian insights so helpfully traced by Robert Pippin.

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