I have two doubts about both Robert Pippin's paper and his recent books. The first is about whether we should think of modernism as posing a philosophical problem, any more than, for example, the development of language by our ancestors poses such a problem. The second is about whether Hegel, after having been de-Cartesianized and de-immaterialized, tells us anything about either freedom or modernity that we could not get just as well from Dewey, Sellars, Habermas or Brandom. The latter are philosophers who have been much influenced by Hegel, but all three are willing to sluff off a lot more of him than is Pippin.

From a bluff Darwinian point of view, the process by which certain mammals developed linguistic behavior and social cooperation poses no more of a philosophical problem than does the process by which certain reptiles developed the ability to fly. In the case of both words and wings, we have informed guesses about what the various stages of these processes were. From a biological perspective, it is implausible that either words or wings, either spirit or flight, could be what Hegel calls "the truth of nature", as opposed to just one of the many things nature has come up with.

It is of course the case that we cannot talk very well about linguistic behavior and social cooperation without using the vocabulary of norms and responsibilities. But then we cannot talk about flight very well without talking about dihedrals and pressure gradients. Why should the use of the first set of terms have a philosophical significance that the second does not?

From the point of view of a bluff economic historian, what Pippin calls "modernity" is the result of various complicated but nevertheless perspicuous processes set in motion by the gold of the Indies, the invention of the steam engine, and similar unpredictable contingencies—contingencies of as little philosophical interest as the mutation that set the proto-archaeopteryx on the road the led to the birds of paradise. The modern West is the sort of thing you would expect to get when millions of people found themselves in the same fortunate position as were the citizens of ancient Periclean Athens. Like their predecessors, these people could get out of doing the dirty work, and had a lot of leisure in which to become literate, conversable, eccentric, and individualistic.

Pippin says that only Hegel gives us the help we need to understand "why we have become so wedded to this notion of ourselves as self-determining individuals, and as so self-determining by reliance on a norm of rationality." But Socrates and his friends were equally wedded to this notion. Once Europe became as rich and leisured relative to the rest of the globe as was the Athenian empire relative to the rest of the Mediterranean, it seems unsurprising that millions of Europeans should acquire self-images rather like Socrates', especially Europeans with a taste for writing books.

I am tossing out these bluff reductionist suggestions in order to press Pippin to say more about why he thinks that Hegel helped us understand, or explain, modernity. I should be happy to agree
that Hegel was very good at celebrating modernity, just as Plato was good at celebrating Socrates. But the story about the nature of things which Plato dreamed up in order to supply Socrates with a suitable environment, like the one which the Church Fathers dreamed up to highlight Christ, and the one Hegel dreamed up to serve as an appropriate foil for modernity, are not happily thought of as explanations. I should be hard-pressed to say that Plato explained Socrates better than Aristotle or St. Augustine could have, or that Hegel explained something about modernity that Dewey or Habermas cannot explain as well. I do not know what would count as a measure of goodness of explanation, or of depth of understanding, in this area.

can form gueses as to the stages of this development If we interpret Hegel's dictum that spirit is the truth of nature in the vegetarian way Pippin does--as etting languages no more poses a the development of language, and thus of everything that Hegel groups under the term "spirit" no more poses a philosophical problem than does the

who do not regard him as either as important --philosophers much influenced by Hegel, but also. a stroke of good luck, there is any point in thinking of modernism as a philosophical problem. The second is whether Pippin has shown that only Hegel's story "will allow us to understand why we [modern Westerners] have become so wedded to this notin of ourselves as self-determining individualsLet me start with some doubts about whether modernism is a philosophical problem, and then go on to the question of whether Pippin is right that Hegel Ever since I read Pippin's Modernism as a Philosophical Problem, I have had the feeling taht