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Nature, Spirit, and Norm in Hegel's *Encyclopedia* and Schelling's *Weltalter*

1. Hegel's Philosophy of Nature: Indispensable yet Problematic

In the context of post-Kantian idealism, one of Hegel's most important innovations is to have introduced speculative logic as a methodologically autonomous master discipline, independent of and prior to the two so-called *Realphilosophien* of nature and spirit. Hegel's students and critics have long debated questions about the precise nature of speculative logic's subject-matter, its relation to more traditional metaphysics, and its methodological independence and rigor. One recent instantiation of such debate is the controversy between Robert Pippin and John McDowell regarding the continuity or discontinuity between nature and spirit. Pippin views McDowell's conceptual realist approach to Hegel as disagreeably naturalistic in its commitment to an underlying continuity between mind and the natural world. Contrary to McDowell, Pippin therefore chooses to emphasize a strong conception of rational freedom or autonomy over against nature, suggesting that McDowell's concern to identify a conceptual element within the properly natural, mind-external sphere commits him to a metaphysical project incompatible with Hegel's normative focus. "There is," Pippin concedes, "a Philosophy of Nature in [Hegel's] *Encyclopedia*, but as anyone who has slogged through it knows, there is a lot there that seems *to turn no other wheel elsewhere in what Hegel says, and very little in the Philosophy of Spirit seems to depend on it or refer back to it.*"¹ Pippin therefore urges us to "leave nature behind" and instead to look exclusively to the normative and rational dimensions of properly spiritual existence.

As right as Pippin certainly is to emphasize the primacy of rational autonomy and normativity, from the hermeneutic perspective there is something troubling about his dismissal of Hegel's philosophy of nature. Hegel himself apparently thought it indispensable to his system of philosophical sciences. We must account

¹ R. Pippin, "Leaving Nature Behind, or Two Cheers for Subjectivism: On John McDowell", in: R. Pippin, *The Persistence of Subjectivity: The Kantian Aftermath*, Cambridge 2005, 189; emphasis added.