

the profoundest and truest insights to be found in the Critique of Reason that the *unity* which constitutes the *essence of the concept* is recognized as the *original synthetic unity of apperception*, the unity of the “*I think*” or of self-consciousness’ (G. W. F. Hegel, *The Science of Logic*, George diGiovanni (tr.) (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 515); or: ‘we find in a fundamental principle of Kantian philosophy the justification for turning to the nature of the “*I*” in order to learn what the *concept* is’ (*ibid.*, 516).) It is the link between the Kantian theme of apperception and Hegel’s notion of *spirit* that is of central importance for Pippin, and one looks for some alternative account of what it is that enables Williams to make use of Kant’s critique of traditional metaphysics within the transcendental analytic.

As indicated earlier, the structure and style of Williams’s book will make it a difficult read for a reader coming to his work for the first time, especially one not familiar with Hegel’s own writings. While this will surely be an important book within ongoing debates about Hegel’s philosophy of religion, for readers new to Williams, and interested in the general themes being investigated here, his more accessible 2012 collection of essays would be a better place to start.

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Thomas S. Hibbs *Wagering on an Ironic God: Pascal on Faith and Philosophy*. (Baylor: Baylor University Press, 2017). Pp. xii + 204. \$44.95 (Hbk). ISBN 978 1 4813 0638 6.

For a book focusing on hiddenness and irony, the first trick is in the title itself. Although it presents itself as a discussion of Pascal’s wager, it conceals within itself a new interpretation of three early modern French philosophers and their relationship to the figure of Socrates. These are Montaigne, Descartes, and Pascal, and Hibbs argues that the thought of all three thinkers is linked to a pivotal question explored by Socrates: how philosophy informs the good life. The key figure in the title gives the game away a little, as Hibbs sees Pascal as the best expositor of the three of what a good life is, although Montaigne is noted as the one who recovers the question, via Socrates, of how to talk about philosophy as a way of life. Thus, whilst the book is a study of all three thinkers, their strengths and weaknesses in answering the question of the good life play out such that there is especial focus on Pascal as resolving or in ways transcending the

issues that arise in Montaigne and Descartes, and of reframing the wager from being an abstract philosophical calculation to a question about life itself and how to live it.

Hibbs starts with a meditation on irony itself, following Jonathan Lear's account of irony as a kind of hiddenness, a concealment. This particular exploration of irony notes how it could inform accounts of revelation, but the stress in Hibbs's book, through Lear's stress on irony's importance for the good life, is pedagogy, and the book hinges on this. Irony, as *the* Socratic pedagogy, filters through the discussions of the good life, and provides the key to understanding the contrast that the wager makes to the rest of the *Pensées*. The polytropic character, as David Corey puts it, of Socrates' philosophy is aligned with Lear's own account of the character of irony, and the discussions of the three thinkers explore the allusions, influences, and implications of their work.

Hibbs moves first to explore questions of irony and the good life in Montaigne. In a chapter that is deeply informative about the quirks of Montaigne's life and thought, which is necessary considering how Hibbs sees that self-knowledge and knowing are subordinated to living a certain kind of life in Montaigne, his philosophy is understood as a care of the self. Philosophy is also separated by Montaigne from theology, despite his theology being a natural theology, and there is a hint that, in contrast to Augustine's take (mentioned here with regard to Augustine's own appropriation and inversion of pagan accounts of the good life), Montaigne holds Socrates perhaps in too high esteem. Yet Montaigne's retrieval of Socrates and concern with confession and self-knowledge set the stage for the book's other interlocutors.

The work of Descartes, focused as it is on sure foundations for knowledge, may seem an unlikely topic for questions of the good life, but Hibbs sees in Descartes's pursuit of certitude and mathematical accuracy a concern for beatitude. Thus Descartes's thought is not a complete reversal of Socrates' own turn from natural philosophy and mathematics to humanity. The approach that Descartes takes to the good life is seen as indirect, and with the focus on irony throughout the book, the indirectness of communication on the good life here becomes part of this pedagogical irony. The *Meditations* is argued here to be an ironic revisiting of Ignatius's *Spiritual Exercises*, which for me raised a slight concern that all indirect communication, such as allusions and references to implicit knowledge, is seen as ironic when sometimes an allusion is just an allusion.

Descartes acts as a contrast in the book to both Montaigne and Pascal, with the latter rejecting Descartes's particular revolution. Both Montaigne and Pascal see knowledge and certitude as impossible to obtain fully, unlike Descartes, aligning themselves instead with the learned wisdom of Socrates. Again, the chief concern of Pascal is argued to be that of the good life: 'according to Pascal, the best life available to unaided human reason is a quest to discern, and live in accord with, the truth about the human condition, but the life of the quest does not itself constitute happiness; only the successful conclusion of the quest does'

(105). This is seen as the context in which the wager must be understood, as Hibbs argues that the wager, with its harsh and extreme demand on the reader, appears out of character with the rest of Pascal's work. In a work devoted to bringing out the uncertainties and that dwells with the hidden, Hibbs's rationalization of the wager seems ironic. However, that exploration is detailed and wide ranging, referencing Jean Luc Marion on the icon and drawing out how the God of the wager could be a play on Descartes's God and evil demon. The wager also acts as an allegory for life, where risk, with its attendant hope and possible failure, are manifested in the act of faith itself, as well as in the human condition.

In summing up the seemingly disparate interests of these three thinkers, concerns such as rationality, humanity, faith, and self-knowledge are argued to coalesce around the question of the good life. It is that concern, Hibbs says, that is lost from modern philosophy, and from how modern philosophy reads the above thinkers. The book ends with a call to modern philosophy: to think as Montaigne, Descartes, and especially Pascal did, to have our philosophical and scientific systems engage with the world we inhabit, to test and to interpolate. Pascal's example is still relevant to us, with Hibbs seeing him as opening up a third way in a philosophical landscape split between a search for Enlightenment rationality and a stress on scepticism in deconstruction. Hibbs calls upon us to find wonder in the world and inquire as to the good, rather than seeking knowledge for knowledge's sake. There is a lot of wonder in this work itself, with how it brings about a different perspective on the three thinkers and the famous wager, and for focusing on questions of the good life and its importance for philosophy. It is a work that is erudite, detailed, and creative, one that opens up new avenues of inquiry and brings about new perspectives, which do service to the life and work of all three thinkers. For all that, however, it is a work that focuses on irony, concealment, and subtext, and thus whilst its conclusions are fascinating, I am wary of wagering on them.

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