

Allegra de Laurentiis (ed). *Hegel and Metaphysics: On Logic and Ontology in the System*. Berlin: de Gruyter, 2016. ISBN 978-3-11-042723-3. £94 (hbk). E-ISBN 978-3-11-042444-7. £94 (PDF). Pp. 233.\*

Edited by Allegra de Laurentiis, this book is a collection of thirteen essays unified under a theme of providing a ‘metaphysical’ interpretation of Hegel’s thought. It presents us with arguments in favour of understanding Hegel’s philosophy as a metaphysics both in its general character and in more specific instantiations. The authors present excellent cases for their individual theses, and, very importantly, demonstrate that the literature on Hegel’s philosophy is not chained to the infamous opaqueness of his texts.

All the contributors agree that Hegel’s philosophy is, in fact, a metaphysics, or that the claims he makes should be understood metaphysically. There is also a consensus that Hegel’s metaphysics should not be understood as the ‘*vormalige*’ or ‘*frühere Metaphysik*’ (120), which the authors identify with the pre-critical/dogmatic/Leibniz-Wolffian system targeted by Kant’s Copernican project. Moreover, Hegel’s own metaphysics cannot be exhausted by Kant’s transcendental turn, but must be understood as, in some way, *overcoming* it.

The most dominant approach to the question of what the ‘metaphysical’ Hegel looks like focuses on what is lost if Hegel were to be read ‘non-metaphysically’. Alper Türken argues that such readings cannot explicate Hegel’s notion of the ‘true infinite’, or that taking seriously Hegel’s claim that the finite shows itself to be infinite through its own nature makes it impossible to read Hegel in a non-ontological or a Kantian way. Giacomo Rinaldi focuses on the topics ‘especially favored by the anti-metaphysical interpretations of [Hegel’s] philosophy’ (102), namely his dialectic and theory of self-consciousness. He elaborates that these conceptually depend on Hegel’s speculative logic, understood as ‘panentheistic theology’ or ‘process metaphysics’ (98) and as such cannot be understood non-metaphysically.

Angelica Nuzzo indicates that without metaphysics we cannot grasp Hegel’s attempt to formulate ‘logical or speculative thinking’, i.e. the immanent development of an activity, free from any (metaphysical/transcendental/phenomenological) subject, from which the fundamental structures of subjectivity emerge as a result (121). Susanne Herrmann-Sinai, elaborates on the metaphysical links between Hegel’s notion of intentional action and his idea of the free self-determination of the Concept. For us to act intentionally, she argues, the

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Concept itself needs to syllogize, making Hegel's theory of action incomprehensible in isolation from his systematic and metaphysical commitments.

Andrew Buchwalter characterizes non-metaphysical readings of Hegel's practical philosophy as those attempting to formulate Hegel's practical concerns without grounding them in his logic, or in his conception of Spirit. But without this, Buchwalter continues, we cannot understand Hegel's formulations of objective spirit, realized freedom, or his conceptions of action and of dialectics. Finally, Robert Bernasconi suggests that reading Hegel 'without metaphysics' implies that Hegel's philosophy stands 'in opposition' to some previous kind of metaphysics. This, Bernasconi suggests, cannot be the case, since for Hegel one cannot overcome something through opposition. By 'metaphysics', Hegel always means 'the history of Western metaphysics in its unity' (146) which, as philosophers, we cannot simply sidestep or ignore.

Other essays ask whether the images of the 'metaphysical' reading that some non-metaphysical interpreters presented properly characterize Hegel's philosophy. Glenn A. Magee proposes that the metaphysical reading tends to be painted as defending an attempt to posit the Absolute as 'some sort of ghostly super-being that transcends the physical universe' (54). Magee argues that this is not true of Hegel, or of any metaphysical reading. Instead, 'the Absolute is this world, understood as a self-specifying, dialectical scale of forms moving toward final consummation in the self-knowledge of the philosopher' (54).

Richard D. Winfield puts forward that claiming Hegel is 'metaphysical' often amounts to arguing his philosophy is either a pre-critical foundational ontology (the study of being *qua* being) or a Kantian system of synthetic *a priori* knowledge. However, Hegel's metaphysics is irreducible to either, because it is an enterprise of knowing things in themselves by searching for conceptual determinations in the Given, while certain of the correspondence of thought and being. Finally, Andrew Davis focuses on non-metaphysical readings that present Hegel's philosophy either as a Lockean/Kantian epistemology, or as a social or discourse theory. Davis proceeds to argue that such interpretations require logic and language to be co-extensive, and attempts to show that logic and language are not co-extensive for Hegel.

The final group of authors tries to understand Hegel's philosophy through an analogy with some other conception of metaphysics. Elena Ficara argues that Hegel's claim about the coincidence of his metaphysics with logic should be understood in an Aristotelian way. Metaphysics, as an investigation of how things are, is therefore the science of valid inference. Hegel's philosophy is a metaphysics in the same way as contemporary (analytic) metaphysics is: a non-dogmatic, self-critical enterprise, revisable upon encountering new evidence, holding

that thoughts, beliefs, and propositions carry ontological commitment. A different appeal to Aristotelianism comes from Paul Giladi. He argues that Hegel's metaphysics is 'speculative naturalism' (149), which is to be understood as a combination of Aristotelian, Kantian, Spinozist, and post-Kantian philosophy of nature. Specifically, Hegel takes his cue from ancient metaphysics, which sees reality as composed of ideal kinds, such as universals or laws of nature. As *speculative* naturalism, Hegel's metaphysics rejects separating reality into different ontological realms, while also resisting the reduction of phenomena to basic naturalistic components.

Another comparative approach comes from Michael Morris. He sees Hegel's metaphysics as centred on the ancient problem of the One-and-the-Many, presenting a system that establishes ontological priority of holistic totality, and an essentially dynamic conception of reality. Beyond this, Morris argues that by not understanding Hegel in this way, we risk misunderstanding Marx, in whose philosophy such metaphysical themes are also present. Finally, Chong-Fuk Lau argues that Hegel's metaphysics is of a 'deflatory' kind: a second-order theory investigating concepts necessary for traditional first-order metaphysics. As such, it is analogous to the respective theoretical commitments of Donald Davidson, Wilfrid Sellars, John McDowell, and Robert Brandom. But while Hegel reduces metaphysics to logic and semantics, Lau contends that Hegel still presents us with a 'meta-physics', i.e. a meta-theoretical speculation regarding every conceivable understanding of reality (32).

As multiple contributors point out, it is difficult to give a positive account of Hegel's own metaphysics, both interpretatively and with regard to the questions of relevance of past philosophy to our own practice. And while all the essays present us with a 'metaphysical' Hegel, there is no clear consensus on what such Hegel looks like, either historically or in relation to contemporary metaphysical issues. However, this lack of the Aristotelian '*pros hen*' (or 'focal') understanding of what metaphysics is supposed to be is not a shortcoming of the book. This is not a monograph from which such a conclusion would be expected. Moreover, if it were a collection of essays on a predetermined notion of metaphysics, it would still be valuable, but probably less accessible.

In its current form, the greatest strength of the volume lies in how it illustrates that asking *whether* Hegel's philosophy is a metaphysics is potentially misleading. Instead, the important issue, explicitly raised by Nuzzo (120), Bernasconi (142), and Giladi (157), regards questioning the nature and place of metaphysics in contemporary philosophy *through* Hegel's philosophy. This allows us to reflect on our own presuppositions concerning what metaphysics,

philosophy, or even thinking itself is or can achieve, and raise further question of why read canonical figures and why it might be important that they (do not) think like us.

Hence, I would disagree with de Laurentiis' statement (3) that the volume demonstrates no exclusive disjunction between metaphysical and non-metaphysical readings of Hegel. Someone could, without too much difficulty, classify these essays into one of these camps. Instead, the volume suggests that such approach to interpreting Hegel should be abandoned since this old debate might have been nothing more than a conflict about branding. If Brandom, McDowell, and Robert Pippin can be seen as exemplars of interpretations that can equally be called 'metaphysical' as well as 'non-metaphysical', this discourse about labelling shows itself as a mere distraction from the important questions regarding *what metaphysics is, what its value is, and what Hegel has to do with it*. The volume does not conclusively show that Hegel should be read 'metaphysically' rather than 'non-metaphysically'. Instead, it signals that this division is yet another opposition that Hegel's philosophy should overcome.

I would like to make one final comment: I would like to have seen a more detailed engagement with what the 'traditional' (or dogmatist/Leibniz-Wolffian) metaphysics was, because of its identification with Hegel's first *Stellung* of thought. The contributors agree Hegel's metaphysics is certainly not of that kind; but while nothing stated about 'traditional' metaphysics in the volume is incorrect, the references to it are confined to what 'everybody knows' about it. For example, when characterising 'traditional' metaphysics, many essays refer to the *metaphysica specialis / metaphysica generalis* division. Unfortunately, this well-known distinction does *not* explicitly appear in Leibniz, Wolff, Baumgarten, or even in Kant's published writings. Therefore, I think asking the question of where this classification comes from and how significant it is to Hegel's relation to 'previous' metaphysics is worth raising in order to gain better understanding of a conception of metaphysics he is trying to overcome.

Dino Jakušić  
dino.jakusic.1@warwick.ac.uk  
University of Warwick