

## Being Hegel: Reflections on Stephen Houlgate, *Hegel on Being*

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My talk is entitled 'Being Hegel'. This is of course a pun on the title of Stephen's book. But it also reflects my view of Stephen: namely that if anyone is Hegel, Stephen is! In fact, whenever one of my graduate students asks me a difficult question about Hegel, and what Hegel might think about something, my usual advice is – write to Stephen, he will know! And he always does....

And now, by virtue of having this splendid book (or books) we get to know what Hegel thinks about Being.....

Let me begin by saying how much I enjoyed reading this book – which is not something one might expect to be said of a two-volume publication on Hegel's *Logic*. Nonetheless, it is true – and Stephen deserves great credit for this. It is obvious that this is a text that has not just been written in the study, but has been extensively taught to students for whom it was important to be as clear as possible, and this is carried over into Stephen's presentation and writing here – key ideas and moves are patiently explained, and if necessary explained again, and every effort is made to help us follow Hegel's often tortuous prose. Stephen also of course conveys his own boundless enthusiasm for Hegel and Hegel's ideas – and this also helps carry the reader over some of the more arid stretches of Hegel's text (though of course, part of the charm of the book is that Stephen clearly thinks no part of Hegel's text is arid – even the discussion of the differential calculus in *Quality*...).

The result, I think, is one of the most significant books on Hegel that has been published in past 30 years or so, perhaps since Robert Pippin's *Hegel's Idealism*. This is not because it is on the *Logic* – after a period of neglect, there have actually been

quite a lot of publications on that text recently, including an important study by Pippin, and an earlier work by Stephen himself. And this is also not because one of the key themes of Stephen's book – presuppositionlessness – is original to this text, as there has also been quite a lot on that, some by Stephen in earlier works. Rather, what makes Stephen's book something of a landmark is the way it really works things out in detail, following through all the moves and micro-moves that Hegel makes in his own text.

This attention to detail is not simply a form of hermeneutic scrupulousness on Stephen's part – though he always indeed a scrupulous and fair-minded reader – but linked to Stephen's understand of Hegel's project as such: namely, that Hegel is setting out a kind of presuppositionless inquiry that moves forward in an internally driven way from one position to the next, and unless we fully understand and grasp this movement in all its rich detail, we will miss what is really going on – to see the wood, we must inspect every tree. And in Stephen's account, believe me, no tree goes uninspected. The result, then, is a rich study that I think will be an essential companion to any reader of Hegel's *Logic* for generations to come. At one point, Stephen remarks: 'In fact, as Nietzsche said of Wagner, Hegel is a great "miniaturist": he is interested in fine – and significant – distinctions between concepts that often get confused with one another, and we, too, need to pay close attention to these distinctions if we are to follow his logic' (1, p. 165). It is to Stephen's great credit that he is true to his word here, and a much more satisfying and complex picture of Hegel and of this text emerges as a result.

But Stephen does not only tell us about Hegel's *Logic*: he also connects this text to a wide range of other thinkers along the way, to bring out how Hegel relates to these philosophers, but also differs from them – invariably to Hegel's credit. (If I ever up on trial in a philosophical court, I want Stephen as my barrister.) Thus, Stephen has chapters discussing Hegel's relation to Kant and to Frege, with frequent other

mentions of Plato, Aristotle, Spinoza, Schelling, and a range of other figures. I was particularly impressed by the engagement with Frege – I am no Frege scholar, but Stephen seemed to me to do an excellent job in bringing out his differences from Hegel, and also why Hegel's challenge should not be ignored, as has generally been the case up to now. Fortunately, Elena is here to comment today on this important aspect of Stephen's book.

However, there is a price to be paid for Stephen's miniaturist approach, which should be mentioned: namely, because of this, despite running to some 800 pages in total, Stephen only gets through Part One of the *Logic* namely 'The Doctrine of Being' – where having read this much, the reader will surely wish they could read what Stephen would say about the rest of Hegel's text, on Essence and the Concept, and will thus wish that these two parts of the *Logic* could be covered in similar amounts of detail. One can only hope that this study of the rest of the *Logic* might come to fruition in the future, as I for one would love to see Stephen's miniaturist discussion of this material too, and his take on where Hegel goes from here.

Nonetheless, we must be grateful for what we have, and we must celebrate that. However, as we all know, in philosophy the best form of celebration is criticism (a good example of the dialectic in action, I guess!), and so I want to raise some mild objections to Stephen's views on some issues – or, if not objections, requests for further elaboration, perhaps. And as this is a Hegel talk, where all good things must come in triads, I will focus on three points in what follows:

First, Stephen's view of Hegel's presuppositionless method, and the link Stephen draws between that and freedom.

Second, Stephen's account of Hegel's method in action, and of the transitions between categories.

Thirdly, Stephen's account of the beginning of the *Logic* and the dialectic of being – nothing – becoming – determinate being, on which of course so much hangs.

(By focusing just on these parts of the text, I am aware people may assume I only read the start of Stephen's book, but not the rest – but that is not true! It is just that a lot turns on these early moves – as everyone knows, give the Hegelian an inch here, and he will take a mile later!)

### 1. Hegel's presuppositionlessness

So let me start by discussing Stephen's view of Hegel's presuppositionless methodology, and his reasons for thinking that Hegel is committed to this. In fact, of course, Stephen has already argued this case elsewhere, and indeed we have already disagreed about it in print – but nonetheless, Stephen sets out his position in this book with greater depth and detail than elsewhere, and also replies to some of my previous points, so I would like to return to the issue here.

But let me start by emphasising where we agree: we agree that Hegel does intend his method to be presuppositionless, and we broadly agree with what this means – where Stephen makes clear that some prior commitments are compatible with presuppositionlessness, so that one does not have to be starting in a complete vacuum; but still, compared to many philosophical projects, Hegel sees the need to give up a lot that other philosophers might think they can take for granted – e.g. common-sense beliefs like 'I have two hands'; that the pure and empirical sciences have been successful in telling us about the world; that various logical laws hold; that there are certain set forms of judgment, to mention just a few.

Where Stephen and I disagree, however, is about what ultimately drives Hegel to adopt this approach, and I will now try to bring out the nature of this disagreement.

The context for our dispute is the relation between Hegel and pragmatism, where in the Introduction to the *Phenomenology* I see some important common ground between Hegel and pragmatism in rejecting a kind of Cartesian doubt, that thinks we should begin philosophy by doubting everything. Stephen however is sceptical about drawing this connection, as he thinks Hegel's project is importantly Cartesian, as Hegel is committed to presuppositionlessness, and this commitment involves taking this Cartesian doubt more seriously than the pragmatist is willing to do.

In response, I now want to suggest that Hegel can be committed to presuppositionlessness without endorsing the Cartesian method of doubt, and so the former need not get in the way of both pragmatists and Hegel rejecting the latter.

To see how this is possible, consider three arguments for why we should not begin a philosophical inquiry by making assumptions:

The first is that these assumptions might be in error, and what we want in philosophy is certainty – so we should subject these assumptions to doubt in order to test their truth. The pragmatist objection to this approach is roughly that doubt requires some grounds or basis, so we should not question (for example) our cognitive capacities unless we have reason to think they are leading us astray.

Likewise, in the Introduction to the *Phenomenology*, Hegel also seems to reject this kind of 'antecedent' scepticism as wrong-headed, asking: 'Should we not be concerned as to whether this fear of error is not just the error itself?' (§47).

Moreover, in his discussions of Descartes in the lectures on the history of philosophy, Hegel seems to downplay this sceptical side to Descartes's method, by questioning whether his focus on doubt and certainty really gets at the heart of the matter, for

example saying that this is just a 'reason why we must make no presuppositions' that Descartes gives 'in his own fashion' (Brown p. 109). Hegel makes this point clearer when he writes that the real issue is not certainty and how to get it, but *freedom*: 'But the doubting of Descartes, his making no hypotheses, because nothing is fixed and secure, does not occur in the interests of freedom as such, in that nothing should have value except freedom itself' (Beiser p. 225). It would seem, that, Hegel and pragmatist can agree in downplaying the significance of Cartesian doubt as a ground for presuppositionlessness.

And I don't think Stephen would disagree, as also for him the issue is not certainty, but freedom, and I think he would agree with Hegel that Descartes himself did not so this clearly. But Stephen holds that this doesn't make any difference when it comes to the issue of pragmatism, as freedom also requires us to begin by doubting everything in a way that the pragmatist is unwilling to do. This is why Stephen still thinks Hegel adopts a Cartesian method of doubt, but this time based not on Descartes own rather naïve argument from certainty, but on a deeper argument from freedom, which is now the second argument for presuppositionlessness we can consider.

This second argument might be put as follows: freedom requires us to question everything, to take nothing for granted, to subject it to doubt and hence critical scrutiny. Thus, universal doubt is required, though on the basis of freedom rather than the pursuit of certainty. Here, the reason for universal doubt is not fear of error, but the desire or imperative to think freely.

But if this is the Hegelian argument for the Cartesian approach, I think the pragmatist might reasonably reject it, by asking why freedom requires any such approach to be adopted? For, I think the pragmatist can argue, two key features of free thought can be met without any such doubting of everything: first, no beliefs one adopts are

based on an external authority telling you what to think, and second, anything we think can be questioned if it turns out that we have reason to do so, so I am perfectly at liberty to doubt it should this prove necessary – but this is not the same as saying we must question everything at once, if our thinking is to be free. This second argument, which tries to move from freedom to universal doubt, thus appears too strong, as there is nothing in the former that requires the latter.

I think Stephen himself might be tempted by this argument, and that he thinks it is Hegel's. For example, he writes: '[F]or Hegel, Descartes' insistence that we must doubt and set aside all our assumptions is thus a clear expression of modern freedom, even though [Descartes] does not explicitly emphasize freedom in his work' (I, p. 15). But then I would be interested to hear Stephen's response to the pragmatist challenge, that freedom does not require universal doubt, and thus does not require us to set aside assumptions on that score.

I also don't think this is Hegel's argument from freedom to presuppositionless, but that he relies on a third argument, namely: to make a presupposition is to accept a belief or claim not knowing why it is the case, the reasons for which are unknown, which is to make it external to thought and thus to limit thought in a way that makes thought unfree. Unfreedom thus does not arise here because universal doubt is necessary for freedom, and presuppositions have not been subjected to such doubt. Rather, unfreedom arises because presuppositions lack a proper grounding (which is which is what makes them presuppositions) and as such they are a limit to thought, and so to the capacities of the reflective agent.

I think Hegel gives expression to this principle when he writes: '[E]very presupposition is something found already there that thinking has not posited, something other than thinking; and thinking is not present to itself in the presupposition... Whatever is recognized as true must present itself in such a way

that our freedom is preserved in the fact that we think' (Brown, p. 109). I take this to mean: the problem with a presupposition is that I then take it for granted without understanding how and why it is true, what makes it the case, which means I cannot claim to fully understand it – and it thus becomes a limit to thought, as a kind of 'given'. If we are to avoid this kind of unfreedom, we must therefore begin without presuppositions. And this is the argument Hegel uses against Jacobi, for example, who he claims 'sets before' (Voraus-setzen) thought a belief in God based on 'immediate intuition or inward revelation' which thought cannot fathom, rendering it unfree (Brown 109). This is also an argument from freedom to presuppositionlessness which Stephen also acknowledges, for example when he writes: 'The task of Hegel's logic is thereby also to raise us to greater freedom: for in such logic our thought is guided by the categories no longer instinctively but "consciously" (*mit Bewußtsein*), and so is what Hegel calls "intelligent and free activity" which "*knows itself*" to be what it is (SL 17 / LS 16-17)' (I, p. 7).

But now, of course, the pragmatist can agree with *this* third argument without compromising their hostility to the Cartesian project of universal doubt – because this argument does not make appeal to any such project. The third argument above requires no reference to the need for doubt either in motivating or conducting the kind of free thinking involved. Thus, while Stephen thinks Hegel's opposition to presuppositions tells against any pragmatist reading of his position in the Introduction to the *Phenomenology*, I (still) do not.

## 2. Hegel's method

As well as Stephen's emphasis on presuppositionlessness in Hegel, another distinctive feature of his reading is the emphasis he places on the *passivity* (or perhaps medio-passivity) of Hegel's method, in the sense that Hegel holds that we



must allow the content of the *Logic* to play itself out, without imposing our own ideas or assumptions on it.

Looking on in this way, we will find that beginning with pure being, the various categories make transitions into others in an immanently dialectical manner, in a way that Stephen traces with enormous care and insight, really showing us in detail how this movement comes about.

Here is one paragraph where Stephen sets out his conception of how the *Logic* works:

We shall see exactly how this process of emergence unfolds when we consider in detail the actual course of speculative logic later in this study. One should note here, however, that such emergence is not something mysterious or irrational, but is produced in a precise way by the category of pure being and subsequent categories. Being proves to be nothing through its utter indeterminacy, and nothing proves to be being through its simple immediacy. Each subsequent category (starting with becoming) then has a more complex logical structure that implicitly contains another category (or other categories) and so makes the latter necessary. Each category thus gives rise through its own logic to a new category (or new categories), and in this sense they develop logically into one another. Since each is a further determination of being, the latter in turn proves to be the process of its own self-development or “self-movement”: the “movement of being itself” (SL 56 / LS 69). We follow this logical development and we articulate it in thought, but the development is not driven by our activity. It is not the result of assumptions that we make, nor is it produced by our reflection on the categories. Categories develop into one another, not because of judgements that we make about them on the basis of our reasoning, but because of what they are logically, that is, through their own immanent logic. (I, pp. 69-70)

As I have said, one of the really significant contributions of Stephen's book (or books) is the painstaking way he explains these developments from one category to the other, showing in detail how exactly these transitions work.

But my question here is a much simpler one: namely, when we look on and see one category make a transition into another, *what is it that we learn?* Or put another way, when 'we articulate in language how one category gives rise to another' (I, p. 76), *what does that tell us?* What is the significance of what we have just witnessed, as it were?

One phrase Stephen often uses in discussing these transitions is that they tell us what one category 'proves to be', for example

Logic, as Hegel conceives it, starts with indeterminate being and then shows (via the thoughts of nothing and becoming) that such being proves to be determinate being and quality. (I, p. 161)

But again, in learning that one category 'proves to be' another, what are we learning? What do we now know that we didn't know before?

In asking this question, I am not asking: what are we learning *about*. Stephen is admirably clear about that: on his view, we are learning something that is both ontological (and thus about reality) and logical (and thus about our thought), where he takes it that Hegel has earned the right to cover both by the way the *Logic* begins, and which I will discuss in the next section.

My question is more basic than this and perhaps just foolishly naïve: it is rather, what kind of thing does this inquiry tell us at these two levels?

As far as I can tell, the answer for Stephen seems to be: what we learn is a series of modal claims, concerning the necessity of the subsequent categories, if the prior

categories are to be made intelligible – and so given that we are starting with being, we are learning about the necessary conditions for both what is, and about the thought of what is.

If that is right, then it would seem that on Stephen's account, Hegel's *Logic* becomes one big transcendental argument – being requires there to be determinate being as its necessary condition, determinate being requires quality as its necessary condition, quality requires something (Etwas) as its necessary condition, and so on. 'Being' thus 'proves to be' determinate being, as unless it took this form, it could not be; and likewise determine being 'proves to be' quality, as quality is required for being to be determinate, and so on.

This transcendental argument is both transcendently idealist (as it is about the necessary structures of our thought) and transcendently realist (as it is about the necessary structures of being) – but insofar as it is focused on claims regarding necessities at both levels, it would seem to be a transcendental argument nonetheless.

I would be interested to know if Stephen would agree with me that on his account, what we learn from Hegel's dialectic is this kind of modal information – that this is what the transition from one category to the next is really telling us – or if not, what is going on instead?

A further question I would like to ask, is whether Stephen is arguing here for a 'twin track' approach – just as we can consider the necessary conditions for being, so we can consider the necessary condition for thought, and the *Logic* tells us about both – or is one grounded in the other?

That is, do the necessary structures of what we can think arise out of the necessary structures of being, because being grounds thought – or the other way round?

And this question then brings us to another very interesting and central issue in Stephen's book, namely the contrast he draws between his view and that of Robert Pippin.

Roughly speaking, in the terms I have just used, Pippin adopts the strategy of offering a transcendental idealist transcendental argument, which focuses on the conditions needed for intelligible thought – but he holds that this still counts as a metaphysics in Hegel, as Hegel unlike Kant rejects any gap between such thought and what there is. By contrast, Stephen reads Hegel as offering us the two forms of transcendental argument in parallel, so we learn both about the necessary conditions of thought, and of being.

How is this possible?

The answer for Stephen hangs on the beginning of the Logic, where due to the presuppositionlessness of the starting point, 'though thinks its own pure simplicity, but such simplicity is precisely sheer indeterminate *being*; thought thinks being, therefore, in thinking nothing but itself' (I, p. 129)

I think we can understand Stephen's idea here as follows:

In thinking nothing but itself, which it must do to avoid putting anything 'before' itself and so working with a 'pre-supposition', thought must take itself to be considering being itself, rather than the thought of being – for to start with just the thought of being is to have started with the assumption that there is being and in addition the thought of it, which is too complex a position with which to begin. It must therefore start in ontological mode, as it were – rather than, on Pippin's account, starting with the thought of being, and then having some further argument that the thought of being and being cannot come apart.

Stephen also has an interesting objection to that argument:

For, he suggests, Pippin goes too far in having to identify being with what is intelligible to thought, as this is to reduce the former to the latter, and thus 'to overlook the fact that thought itself conceives of being as *irreducible* to being-for-

thought’ – but Stephen then adds ‘where “irreducible to” does not have to mean “beyond”’ (I, p. 395 n 96).

Stephen thus claims to be able to respect the irreducibility of being to thought on the one hand, while denying that Hegel’s metaphysics leaves being as outside or inaccessible to thought on the other hand, because it starts with a ‘direct ontological consciousness of being’ (I, p. 131), and proceeds from there, in what looks like a transcendental realist manner, by seeing what the conditions for that being prove themselves to be, as made necessary by the nature of being itself, not just our thought about being

Now, a lot in this discussion obviously now hinges on the beginning of the *Logic*, so in my final section I want to focus on what Stephen says about Hegel’s position there. This will also bring to light two reasons why even the transcendental realist reading of Stephen’s position may not be correct, in a way that perhaps is problematic.

### 3. Hegel’s beginning

The beginning of the *Logic* is of course one of the most discussed and disputed parts of Hegel’s text, where readers have rightly seen that much hangs on what may or may not be achieved by what happens here.

Stephen thus gives it a characteristically thorough and insightful analysis, addressing many of the familiar complaints from Schelling and others.

Stephen’s chapter starts as follows, picking up on the issues we have been discussing:

Speculative logic begins with the thought or category of being; yet this thought bring to mind *being* itself in its immediacy. Such logic is thus from the start both a logic and a metaphysics. (I, p. 136)

Now, as Stephen notes, this may seem surprising to many Hegelians, given Hegel's apparent hostility to the idea of immediacy, where he quotes Hegel saying: 'there *is* nothing in heaven or nature or spirit or anywhere else that does not contain both immediacy and mediation' (cited I, p. 138) – so how *can* thought 'bring to mind *being* itself in its immediacy'?

Stephen's response to this question is to argue that given that we must begin presuppositionlessly, we cannot *assume* what Hegel claims here concerning the need for mediation, and so 'We have no choice, therefore, but to begin with pure being in its immediacy' (ibid.).

However, another option here is to say that this is what we must set out or *try* to do – but we fail insofar as in trying to bring being to mind in its immediacy (i.e. pure being), we end up bringing nothing to mind instead – and it is precisely from this that we learn something about the necessary conditions for being, namely that being requires mediation and not just immediacy, so that the modal insight we gain as part of this transcendental argument arises precisely because we *fail* to 'bring to mind *being* itself in its immediacy'.

But then, of course, if we fail to do so, we cannot be starting from a position that is 'both a logic and a metaphysics', as we have failed to bring pure being to mind at all – indeed (on this account), it is precisely Hegel's point that this cannot be done, which is how we learn what else is needed to make being and the thought of being possible.

Thus, the problem is that where Stephen writes 'Our task, as philosophers, is then to consider *what else*, if anything, such indeterminate being proves to be' (I, p. 138, my emphasis), this suggests that we first think indeterminate being, and then add to it from there – but it seems to me we move beyond indeterminate being by coming to see that there is and can be no such thing

Stephen is right that we cannot *assume* there is no such thing at the outset – but nonetheless, I think this is what the dialectical transition from pure being to nothing shows us, in a properly presuppositionless manner

And if the dialectic *doesn't* work in this way, then how does the 'proof' work that indeterminate being requires 'something else'?

If that proof is transcendental, it is based on the claim that it needs more because it cannot *be* as indeterminate being, as the 'more' is a necessary condition for being to avoid nothingness

But Stephen seems to allow that it can be as indeterminate being, but just needs other features adding – but *why*? What is the argument for those features being necessary, unless indeterminate being cannot itself be?

But then, if indeterminate being cannot be, how can we begin the *Logic* by actually thinking it, as Stephen's argument against Pippin seems to require?

As Stephen himself puts it: 'Through its sheer indeterminacy, therefore, pure being disappears before our very eyes: it proves not to be being after all, but to be sheer and utter nothing' (I, p. 141)

But then, how can we claim to have started with the thought of pure being, and thus to have begun on an ontological path as a result?

Now, in response, and based on what he says in the next sections in which he brings in nothingness, Stephen might reply by saying that I have exaggerated here the identity between being and nothingness, as Hegel also suggests they remain distinct – and if this is not preserved, we cannot get to the next category of becoming, which involves some transition between them

So even though being 'vanishes' into nothing because it is indistinguishable from it, it is also distinct from it, as vanishing is a movement from one thing into another – so there is a difference, but an 'unstable' one

Now, at this point, Stephen has one of his touching periodic expressions of sympathy for the reader of Hegel:

‘Some readers will find [this] dialectic to be a source of insight and, indeed, inspiration; otherwise will find it to be a source of intense frustration’ (I, p. 146).

Too right! But I think Stephen misdiagnoses the frustration, which he thinks arises because it seems to be ‘deliberately flouting the traditional principles of reasoning for its own sake’

But I think the worry is deeper than that:

On the one hand, as Stephen says: pure being ‘proves not to be being after all, but to be sheer and utter nothing’

But also somehow it doesn’t – it is still pure being, distinct from nothing.

Now, that can make sense, if these states are the same in in some respects, but different in another – but of course we can’t say anything like that here, as that thought requires us to have gone beyond immediate being which has no ‘aspects’

So what on earth is going on??

In my view, it is something like this:

The simplest ontological account of what there is, is that what is is pure being

But that cannot be the correct account, as if what there is was pure being, it would be nothing

But nothing is an absence of being – which involves the possibility of the transition from being into nothing and vice versa, and hence becoming

But then becoming requires determinate being, and so on

Thus, the pure being from which we begin is really nothing

But nothing is an absence of being, and for being to be absent it must be able to arise and pass away, and so not be pure being at all

But if this is right, it still makes trouble for Stephen’s account: as where we start is in fact not being but nothing, and it is hard to build any ontology on that alone



But perhaps, unlike Stephen as the master, I have not yet learned to be sufficiently dialectical here, in which case I look forward to learning more....

Finally, let me move on to a second point about the beginning, which also puts pressure on even the realist transcendental reading of Hegel, which again leaves me wondering how the various dialectical transitions are to be understood if this reading is rejected.

This issue emerges not in Stephen's discussion of the beginning of the *Logic* itself, but a little later in the discussion of 'Something and Other' (Chapter 8) – but where it there transpires that Stephen sees this beginning as enabling Hegel to answer Leibniz's question – why is there something rather than nothing?

Now, there are two ways Leibniz's question could be taken:

One reading is – why is there anything at all, why is there not rather just nothing? Let us call this the 'nihilism question'

Another reading is – why does being consist not just of pure being, becoming, determinate being, but of 'somethings', of things which are. Let us call this the 'somethings question'

Now the second question can be addressed in a transcendental manner, as one can try to show that for there to be anything at all, there must be somethings – so not just becoming etc.

And the way Stephen sometimes puts it suggests this reading, for example:

For Kant, "something" is the most abstract concept we can entertain (besides "nothing"). This concept cannot be derived from that of "nothing" or from any other concept, but is simply fundamental to thought. In Kant's view, therefore, we cannot explain why we should employ the concept of "something". Hegel, by contrast, thinks we can explain this. According to

speculative logic, the category of pure being gives rise to that of determinate being and then that of something, and so in this way it makes the latter logically necessary. Moreover, since such logic is at the same time a metaphysics, it shows that being itself thereby requires that there be something. Indeed, beginning with nothing leads to the same result, since nothing, via becoming and determinate being, also makes something necessary. Hegel's logic thus not only explains why we must think in terms of "something", but it also provides a definitive answer to the question posed by Leibniz: "why is there something rather than nothing?". (I, p. 169)

If we take Hegel to be addressing the 'somethings' question, then the transcendental reading makes sense, because the transcendental approach is to try to determine the necessary conditions *for* being rather than to try to argue for the necessity *of* being

But then, of course, one is not addressing the nihilism question, as this question wants to know why there is anything at all – not just why there are 'somethings'. One way to address this question would be to demonstrate that being is necessary – so there could not be nothing, which is then the reason why there is something rather than nothing.

But then one would be going beyond any transcendental argument, which can only tell you about the necessary conditions for being, but not that being itself is necessary rather than contingent.

Now, I am not quite sure where Stephen stands on this.

When I first read the passage I have quoted, I thought he was claiming Hegel is answering the nihilism question

But I am now not sure – I think he could be taking Hegel to just be answering the 'somethings' question instead

And this may explain why here Stephen does not mention Schelling as a critic of Hegel, though Schelling is prominent in the discussion elsewhere – because if Hegel is just answering the ‘somethings’ question, I don’t think he is answering Schelling, who I take to be asking the nihilism question.

But then, of course, this question is left hanging.

So there seems to be a dilemma here:

Either Stephen thinks Hegel is answering the nihilism question – but then that takes us beyond the transcendental method of starting from being and uncovering its necessary conditions by seeing what being ‘proves to be in truth’

Or Stephen thinks Hegel is just answering the somethings question, which can plausibly be answered transcendently – but then I am not sure Leibniz’s question, at least as this is posed by Schelling, is really answered?

So I would welcome further discussion of this issue too – which I now look forward to having....