

## Review

**Eric Lee Goodfield.** *Hegel and the Metaphysical Frontiers of Political Theory*. New York and London: Routledge, 2014. ISBN 978-0415698474. Pp. 266.

In *Hegel and the Metaphysical Frontiers of Political Theory*, Eric Lee Goodfield presents a much needed correction against the tendency of recent scholars to rehabilitate Hegel's ethical and political philosophy by underplaying its relation to his metaphysical thinking. The book is as much a work of intellectual history as it is a work of Hegel scholarship. It offers an account of how Hegel's metaphysical thinking fell into disrepute, how the discipline of political science emerged in a context of positivism and liberalism which was suspicious of Hegel, and how a recent generation of Hegel scholars sought to reintroduce Hegel's political thought by underplaying its metaphysical underpinnings. This intellectual history is valuable, because it can make political theory and political science more reflective about some of their methodological presuppositions, especially those concerning the boundaries of their disciplines. Before finally developing a reading of the *Science of Logic* as a work that informs Hegel's *Philosophy of Right*, Goodfield persuasively demonstrates that non-metaphysical interpretations of Hegel's political thought not only go against Hegel's expressed intentions, but weaken many of Hegel's political arguments. However, the work presents a somewhat one-dimensional interpretation of how Hegel's metaphysics informs his political thought. I would argue that Goodfield engages so extensively with the liberal critics of Hegel, as well as his non-metaphysical rehabilitators, that his reading of Hegel is largely guided by their conceptual framework, even where he is arguing against them.

Goodfield makes a very persuasive, Hegelian argument for why political philosophy has to care about deep metaphysical questions: whenever we think, we make use of categories. These categories stand in a dynamic relation to each other and involve a tacit commitment to what exists and how it exists. Throughout his *Phenomenology* and *Science of Logic*, Hegel shows that thinking that takes refuge in common sense notions of immediate experience, intuition, finitude and individual autonomy and that such notions actually harbour deep metaphysical commitments which lead to contradictions. When political thinking makes use of concepts such as freedom, self-interest, individuality, particularity and the like, it has to ask: how real are any of these things? Is not their very reality

embedded in a conceptual context that includes complementary concepts? For Hegel, *Logic* is the process of exploring what such concepts mean, what their metaphysical reality is, how they are related to other conceptual determinations and what their methodological function should be within any applied thought. Hegel constantly seeks to show that what we take as an immediate given can only exist within a complex structure of mediation.

The first three chapters of Goodfield's study do not deal directly with Hegel's own texts, but discuss the intellectual context of the present view that metaphysics should be separated from political theory. First he explores a series of critical readings of Hegel, ranging from Ludwig Feuerbach's and Karl Marx's to British analytic readings such as Bertrand Russell's and G. E. Moore's. A common theme in these readings is the question of Hegel's alleged conception of the state as possessing metaphysical reality. The first generation of German critics of Hegel were concerned with the violence that Hegel's philosophy does to the concrete particular. As the twentieth century progressed, Goodfield demonstrates, British philosophy came to see Hegel's philosophy of ethical life as an embodiment of Prussian statism or Nazi totalitarianism. The view that political ideals have a kind of metaphysical reality that transcends the individual came to be seen as a metaphysical justification for an oppressive state, and the Hegelian equation of the actual and rational came to be interpreted as an apology for tyranny.

In the second chapter, Goodfield convincingly demonstrates how these critiques of Hegel's thought went along with the rise of empiricism and positivism in the emerging discipline of political science. He traces a kind of alliance between the victory of liberal politics in the post-war era and the dominance of positivist methodology in the social sciences. The belief in free markets, democracy, public opinion and the rights of individuals went along with methods of investigation that call for concrete testable hypotheses while dismissing metaphysical speculation as a regression to an unscientific mode of thinking. This alliance between liberalism and positivism resulted in the view that to speak of society is to speak of aggregates of individual things, consumers, voters, citizens, etc., thus making it impossible to identify any common purpose or ideal animating these things.

The third chapter then demonstrates how recent generations of Hegel scholars, including Shlomo Avineri, Charles Taylor and Allen Wood, reclaimed a place for Hegel's political thought within the canon, without fundamentally challenging the prohibition on metaphysical speculation. For the most part, these Hegel scholars treat Hegel's *Logic* as a weak and untenable element in his philosophy, and claim that there are valuable insights in Hegel's political philosophy that can be maintained and defended independently of the logic. What Hegel is giving us in the *Philosophy of Right*, according to these readings, is a

narrative about the viability of how individual agents manage to will freedom for themselves. But in Goodfield's view they do not do enough to question the relative ontological status of the concrete individual as the final unit for analysis.

After laying out this intellectual context, Goodfield's project faces the challenge of demonstrating a vital connection between Hegel's logic and his political philosophy. How is he to establish that this connection is crucial not only for Hegel's own understanding of his project, but for any attempt to apply his political philosophy to contemporary political debates? For Goodfield, the central insight from Hegel's *Logic* which has political import is the relation of universal and particular. Virtually all of the positions discussed in the first three chapters, from liberal critics of Hegel to post-metaphysical defenders of Hegel, affirm a metaphysics of the concrete individual existing in isolation from any overarching universal. Goodfield demonstrates that they are moving within a well defined metaphysical space: the ancient debate over universals and nominalism. His reading of Hegel thus focuses on the originality of Hegel's contribution to this debate and the applicability of his solution to his political philosophy.

Goodfield's reading of Hegel as a metaphysical philosopher hinges on the claim that Hegel came up with an original conceptual innovation for solving the problem of universals: the notion of syllogistic mediation. As he writes, 'the culmination of the *Logic* in the syllogism represents Hegel's offering of a resolution to the problem of universals as a specifically metaphysical problem' (103). As Goodfield demonstrates, the notion of the syllogism gives Hegel a way to affirm the reality of universals and their effectiveness in the world without giving them the status of entities that mysteriously exist prior to or independently of the particular things. Rather, the universal exists as an implication of the particular as well as an 'intellectual engine' (127) that gives structure and purpose to the particular nature of things. I also strongly agree with Goodfield that the *Logic* should not merely be read as a doctrine of conceptual categories and the logic of subjective thought, but also as a doctrine of how these concepts shape real things and processes in their development. He frames what is at stake in reading the *Logic* as a metaphysics that shapes the *Realphilosophie* effectively as follows:

The problem of universals is thus not merely an abstract metaphysical problem which Hegel took up to reunite subject and substance, world and mind; it is also at the very heart of the intellectual engine which generates his dynamic of self and other relating through ideas. In other words, the problem is not merely metaphysical, but social, psychological and linguistic, as well as, by extension, inevitably political. (127)

However, Goodfield's account of the *Logic* gives a rather light treatment of what I take to be the most politically fruitful and logically nuanced treatment of the

syllogism: Hegel's description of the state and civil society as a 'syllogism of syllogisms' in the Absolute Mechanism chapter of the *Science of Logic*. Goodfield argues that this passage represents a metaphor [that] only carries over in a form which approaches the objective universality of the social order, and not its inner subjective spirituality' (151). This passage is important not merely because it is by far the most explicit anticipation of Hegel's conception of civil society and the state within the *Logic*, but also because it adds a logical nuance that seems to complicate Goodfield's account. We see in this passage that Hegel aims not merely to defend the reality of the universal over and against the particular, but even more to trace multiple, logically complimentary, but irreducible forms of mediation between the universal, singular and particular. In political life, each of these moments serves a mediating role in relation to the others, and ethical life is only a rational whole if it is able to account for these various patterns of mediation. This is to say that the state needs the freedom of civil society as much as the citizen needs the state to feel at home in civil society. Hegel is just as much concerned with a rich, non-reductive account of individuality and particularity as with universality, and it is the complex dynamic of interactions between the *multiple* syllogisms that distinguishes Hegel's political metaphysics from the ancient tradition. I would argue that attention to this thought figure from Hegel might also lead Goodfield to a more robust account of civil society and freedom in subsequent phases of his study.

Another problem I see with the book stems from a discontinuity in its composition: the main chapter on Hegel's *Logic* seems to be an article of Goodfield's on Hegel's relation to Plato and ancient philosophy. This chapter reads Hegel's *Logic* as a novel response to the problem of universals in ancient philosophy. While this reading clearly bears a relation to the book's larger political claims, the chapter might have spent less time comparing Hegel's *Logic* to ancient philosophies and more time relating the *Logic* to Hegel's *Philosophy of Right*. I believe that a more cohesive reading of Hegel's *Science of Logic* would reveal that the relation of particular and universal is only one of many points at which the logic and the *Philosophy of Right* intersect.

The challenge to any reading of the *Science of Logic* is precisely that the text does not allow itself to be boiled down to any single conceptual problem. Goodfield seems to read the logic essentially as a protracted philosophical argument about the relation between the universal and the particular, a metaphysical problem that translates into the relation of citizen and state. However, the *Logic*, or at least the 'Doctrine of the Concept', could just as well be read as a metaphysical response to the question of freedom or self-determination. The work is meant to show that freedom is not possible as an ontological property of a thing, but only in an act of understanding that embraces change, negativity and the coordination of diverging movements. The concept of

self-determination equally plays a vital role in Hegel's *Philosophy of Right*, and we still need a much better understanding of how this theme has metaphysical underpinnings that draw from the *Logic*.

Overall, I recommend Goodfield's book as a valuable contribution to Hegel scholarship and an enlightening challenge for political theory, especially in the English speaking world. Goodfield is correct to advocate that Hegel is a systematic philosopher whose deepest and most compelling insights make use of a method and vocabulary which gets worked out in the *Logic*. Hegel scholars, least of all, should fear stepping out onto what Goodfield aptly calls the metaphysical frontiers of political thought. However, I suggest that a metaphysical reading of Hegel's political philosophy need not focus so exclusively on the problem of universals, and that there are other metaphysical problems that have a direct bearing on Hegel's politics.

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