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Review

Michael J. Thompson, ed. *Hegel's Metaphysics and the Philosophy of Politics*. New York and London: Routledge, 2018. ISBN 978-1-138-28851-5 (hbk). ISBN 978-1-315-26783-8 (ebk). Pp. 333.

Although most commentators on Hegel seem to be in agreement that he himself thought of his philosophical system as having a certain kind of dependence on its metaphysical underpinnings, there has of course been no shortage of non-metaphysical readings of various aspects of both his *Science of Logic* and the subsequent *Realphilosophie*. The twelve essays in this collection call this separation between Hegel's politics and metaphysics into question. Of particular value is the continual emphasis made almost throughout that the need for a metaphysical reading of Hegel's politics is not simply one that allows us to have a consistent view of Hegel's system, but that it is only through a metaphysical reading of the political that the normative and critical moments of Hegel's thought gain any ontological weight. In doing so, such a reading can then be used to understand not only Hegel's present, but also our own.

While all of the three sections of the volume keep to the themes of metaphysics and politics, the first leans more heavily into the metaphysical side. Indeed, Peter J. Steinberger's essay mostly focuses on defining exactly what *Geist* means for Hegel. He does this by arguing that *Geist* ought not to be thought in terms of one single meaning, but in terms of four characteristics–all possible true propositions about the world, all known propositions about the world, the process of thinking itself, and an individual activity. To clarify these various senses of *Geist*, he also draws an analogy between it and mathematics, arguing that both mathematics and *Geist* cannot be reduced to any one of these elements. The motivation for the piece stems from lines from the *Zusatz* to §258 of the *Philosophy of Right*, where Hegel writes both that 'the state is the course of God in the world' and 'the state is *Geist* that is present in the world'. Steinberger notes that to explain *Geist* is an exceedingly ambitious if not impossible task, but he nonetheless accomplishes this with remarkable precision and relative brevity, and also convincingly demonstrates why there is a clear need to know what core concepts for Hegel mean in their metaphysical context both in and preceding their appearance in his political writings.

Andrew Buchwalter also focuses on the concept of *Geist*, once again emphasizing a position contrary to a non-metaphysical reading,[1] and that *Geist* needs to be

understood as 'the conjunction of substance and subjectivity' (33), the former determination presumably requiring some retention of a metaphysical reading of this central concept. His essay focuses, however, not just on the correctness of such a reading, but its value. One such reason why this reading ought to be appreciated is the inherent necessity for openness and revisability that the process of *Geist* provides.

Angelica Nuzzo unites not only the practical and the metaphysical but also our own present, or 'a situation of deep historical crisis' (56), with Hegel's *Logic*. Her focus is not simply on drawing from a particular section of the text or even one thought determination, but on the role of transition itself in the *Logic*. At the core of her analysis is the idea that not only does each transition in the *Logic* happen at a moment of stasis but that it is only *through* the immanence of these moments that change occurs. A lesson of Hegel's *Logic* is thus that change is a result of the negativity inherent in each determination, and therefore change occurs not by forces external to a moment but rather through a kind of patience with what is immanent to a particular determination. As Nuzzo puts it, '[t]he interesting paradox here is that the true advancement is made only by dwelling where one is, not by aiming forward in the pursuit of something else' (63). This changes how we confront immanence as a problem, or whether or not we can have a critical standpoint while necessarily being limited by the historical moment we are embedded in. While it may seem as if it will always be a problem to have a proper critical standpoint on one's present position, the fact that transformation for Hegel occurs only through an immanent development being mediated by itself gives us resources to see that our own immanence is not merely some hindrance to change occurring, but is in fact a necessary moment of any moment or crisis. Her essay stands out as a prime example of the many resources there are in Hegel's *Logic* for thinking through political concepts.

Eric Goodfield's contribution is valuable for those seeking a history of non-metaphysical, specifically positivist interpretations and critiques of Hegel's thought. Far from being a merely historical overview, however, he makes a crucial argument that such critiques of Hegel are symptomatic of 'liberal dogmatic ideology' (77), which once again demonstrates how a non-metaphysical reading of Hegel's political philosophy significantly blunts its critical capacity. Hence, Goodfield is not only able to demonstrate that Hegel has critical resources that allow him to answer any charges of quietism, but also that it is in fact many of Hegel's critics in the twentieth century and onwards who are at risk of becoming dogmatic endorsers of present ideology.

The articles in Part II offer no less of a metaphysical reading of the *Philosophy of Right*, but focus more on that text rather than the *Logic*. Here, the stakes become even more apparent for why a metaphysical reading matters not merely to get an accurate reading of Hegel, but for a critical standpoint on our current political

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framework. Michael J. Thompson argues that it is precisely a narrow liberal individualism that loses any substantial sense of a shared, concrete good, while also not 'violat[ing] either the condition of rational individuality or the condition of our essence as socially interdependent beings' (102). To support this, he offers a close reading of the role of relationship within the *Science of Logic*, specifically at the transition from the Doctrine of Essence to the Doctrine of the Concept. Crucial for Thompson is the claim that the moments of a process are not just passive to some pre-given ontological process, but constitute the process itself. Moreover, his account of the unity of truth and goodness also draws the nature of an ontological framework into sharper focus. For Hegel, Thompson argues, the end or *telos* of an object signifies both the truth of the object and its criteria for what makes it good: 'to know the truth of any thing is also to know what makes it good' (121). Hence, any appeal to normative criteria will, or ought to, involve an appeal to the logical structure and ends of something, which once again demonstrates the necessity of an account of Hegel's logical understanding of relationships and processes.

The respective chapters by Sebastian Stein and Michael Morris focus on different aspects of Hegel's relationship to Kant. Stein wishes to bring to light many of the agreements between Hegel and Kant. Even when there are obvious differences, as in the case of Hegel's assessment of the categorical imperative, he sees not so much a strong opposition between the two, but Hegel noticing truths in Kant's theory that Kant himself did not see. Of great value is his discussion of the relationship between universality, particularity and individuality that he sees in both thinkers. He outlines sharply how both thinkers view these moments as essential to their account of practical reason, but that ultimately Hegel criticizes Kant for keeping the three independent from one another. Morris, conversely, wants to resist thinking of Hegel as a post-Kantian, favouring instead a reading that will view him as a proto-Marxist. Like so many of the contributors to this collections, his concerns lie mainly in the reception of Hegel's thought in the Anglophone world and he is squarely opposed to a post-Kantian reading that means that Hegel is a non-metaphysical thinker.

Part II ends with Kevin Thompson's contribution against a non-metaphysical Hegel by emphasizing Hegel's systematic account of Objective Spirit over and against a representationalist one. A representationalist reading will inevitably involve a descriptive rather than prescriptive account of Objective Spirit, leaving it and its historical conventions open to skeptical attacks. Aside from issues posed by skepticism and the Agrippan trilemma, however, Thompson also notes that the representationalist model will not justify, but only presuppose Objective Spirit. In doing so, any normative features within Objective Spirit are sacrificed, 'leaving its institutions and practices but dogmatic shackles or restrictions on freedom' (204). Hence, once again we see the metaphysical reading of

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Hegel not imposing thought on reality, but instead providing us with a critical standpoint to see whether reality has lived up to its own rational determinations.

The third and final section of the volume begins with Christopher Yeomans's chapter, which focuses on the elements within the social domain—corporate society, civil society and the state. They must be seen as moments of one whole, not simply atomistic elements within a social structure, but rather moments of a Hegelian concept, since this totality is constituted by these moments *as* universal (civil society), particular (corporate society) and individual (the state). Yeomans argues that we should not then view these moments or dimensions as objects, but as *perspectives*.

Joshua D. Goldstein concentrates on the family, contrasting Hegel's view of marriage with that in the ancient world. Although Goldstein notes that both Hegel and the Greeks place great significance on the act of marriage, the central difference, which is not only a Hegelian but a modern one, is that Hegel views marriage not merely as an act of love, but of freedom. However, Goldstein carefully notes that grounding the metaphysics of marriage in freedom is a task that is by no means straightforward, and he lays out two distinct ways of understanding this position. The first of these attempts is a teleological one that inherits elements of Aristotle's naturalism, yet, for Goldstein, ultimately fails. Similarly, grounding the ethicality of marriage in Hegel's ontology of freedom will not be a viable option either, since it actualizes freedom at the expense of achieving something that could be recognized as marriage. Goldstein concludes by arguing for the perfection of marital freedom being achieved in and through sexual embodiment. The conclusion of his essay is of particular interest in providing a non-heteronormative reading of Hegel's conception of marriage. Goldstein argues that the freedom at work in marriage is accomplished through the particularity of its members, which would not preclude members who are, for example, not straight or cis-gendered.

While we may not be surprised at one of the conclusions of David's Kolb's chapter—namely that Hegel thinks that a society placing ultimate significance in the sort of individual choice found in market mechanisms is inadequate—his way of arriving there is particularly interesting and again a helpful example of shedding light both on Hegel's politics and metaphysics. Specifically, Kolb argues against mathematical models of the economy, through an account of the relationship between necessity and contingency. The role of the latter as constitutive of the former means that, for Hegel, abstract mathematical models will be fundamentally limited since they cannot grasp the differences inherent in given communities.

The collection appropriately ends in a similar manner to Hegel's *Philosophy of Right*, with a discussion of world history. Matthew J. Smetona asks whether or not history determines how Hegel's political philosophy will be characterized. This returns us to the concerns at work in so many of the earlier essays, for it seems

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that if Hegel's philosophy is historically determined, its normative weight will seem to be diminished, if not lost altogether. The essay closes by making the claim that Hegel is aligned with Marx in taking the view that the modern constitutional state and its institutions of bourgeois society are, far from signaling anything like the end of history, merely a prehistory, *Vorgeschichte*, and will eventually expire.

Although much of Hegel scholarship in the last century has argued for a non-metaphysical reading of Hegel's philosophy, this collection is an excellent example of a renewed interest in the role that Hegel's ontology plays within his political thought. While the contributors largely make up one side of this debate, the volume will certainly prove to be a valuable resource for those wishing to see what can be gained from a metaphysical understanding of Hegel's politics, and to consider the limitations of a reading of Hegel that renders the metaphysical and political independent from one another.

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Note

[1] He positions himself primarily against Habermas, Honneth and Brandom.

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