

Review

Paulo Diego Bubbio. *God and the Self in Hegel: Beyond Subjectivism*. Albany NY: SUNY Press, 2017. ISBN 978-1-4384-6525-8 (pbk). ISBN 978-1-4384-6524-1 (hbk). Pp. 228. \$85.00/\$22.95.

God and the Self in Hegel makes two essential contributions to the understanding of Hegel's philosophical thought. The first and larger contribution consists in an interpretation of Hegel which, while figuring him as a post-Kantian who by and large accepts Kant's refutation of classical metaphysics, also sees him as correcting Kant's subjectivism. The second and narrower contribution lies in an analysis and recommendation of Hegel's philosophy of religion. According to Bubbio, the principal appeal of Hegel's philosophy of religion consists in how it articulates an alternative to both atheism, which denies any relation between the divine and the self, and theism, which misunderstands the relation between God and world and God and self in crucial respects. For Bubbio, the broader and narrower contributions are mutually reinforcing: on the one hand, in order for philosophy to articulate fully and adequately its conceptual framework, it is necessary to refer to the Christian articulation of the God–world and God–self relations; on the other hand, in order to articulate adequately the God–world and God–self relations, Hegel's articulation of a network of categories internally related to each other and dynamically evolving is a *sine qua non*.

From the outset, Bubbio leaves the reader in no doubt as to what the proximate horizons of his Hegel interpretation are. With regard to his general interpretation of Hegel, Bubbio situates himself largely within that North American transcendental interpretation with a social epistemology twist, respectively advocated by Robert Pippin (3–6) and Terry Pinkard (3–6, 51–52), which has come to dominate some Anglo-American Hegel scholarship. With regard to his narrower contribution concerning Hegel's philosophy of religion, Bubbio associates his position with, in particular, the work of Robert Williams (2–3; also 137–41) and, to a certain extent, that of Peter Hodgson (135–36). Bubbio acknowledges the tension that exists between these two different groups of Hegel interpreters. Williams and Hodgson are not only thinkers who have considered views on Hegel's rendition of Christian doctrines, which for Bubbio lies beyond his particular brief, but they are also thinkers who actually seem to view Hegel as making metaphysical claims, albeit ones that presuppose Kant's dismantling of objectivistic metaphysics (84). Uniting

both lines of interpretation, Bubbio argues that Hegel is a post-Kantian philosopher with a post-critical metaphysics (166).

Bubbio does not refrain from making the obvious point that Hegel never regresses to pre-modern objectivistic forms of thought, despite his two worries about subjectivism in Kant (147–60; also 38–44). The first worry concerns the understanding of the relation of thought and reality; the second worry concerns the understanding of the relation between philosophy and Christianity. While the fit between thought and reality in pre-modern philosophy can continue to have an orienting role, it cannot function as a basic presupposition. For Bubbio, Hegel selectively retrieves from the pre-modern tradition in the areas of both general philosophy (Aristotle) and philosophy of religion (Anselm) (85–90), and feels entitled to do so. Nonetheless, this retrieval is always conducted under the assumption that the pre-modern distinction between thought and being requires conceptual work to be overcome. Both Hegel's philosophy in general and his philosophy of religion in particular proceed within the transcendental horizon of Kant, even if Hegel enacts major corrections with regard to Kant's understanding of the relation of thought and reality as well as his understanding of Christian symbols and narrative and philosophical conceptualization.

As the proximate interpretive horizon for Hegel's departure from Kant on general philosophical grounds is set by the respective interpretations of Pippin and Pinkard, especially as they are emended by Paul Redding (4–8, 50–53), the proximate interpretive horizon for Hegel's emendation of Kant within the narrower area of philosophy of religion is provided by Robert Williams. As has been charted by Williams and, of course, other scholars, Hegel is dissatisfied with the merely postulated character of God in the Second Critique, judging Kant to have confused conceptual *need* with conceptual *validity*. Perhaps even more importantly, following Williams and others, Bubbio argues in chapter 4 of his book that Kant's objections against Anselm's ontological argument have at best restricted validity (94–103). Kant's objection, which rests on the distinction between existence as a predicate and existence as a function of an actual claim, holds only to the extent that the epistemological horizon for the ontological argument implies the subject-object distinction. The ontological argument, however, can be saved if it is brought into a horizon that moves knowing beyond this binary and into an environment in which knowing is understood not to be exhaustively finite. Equally important for Bubbio, as he demonstrates in chapter 1, is how Hegel rethinks Kant's charting of the relation between Christian symbols, narrative and philosophical conceptuality as originally laid down in *Religion within the Boundaries of Reason Alone* (1793). According to Bubbio, Hegel is right to think that Kant misunderstands both terms of the relation and thus the relation itself. Kant is taken to misunderstand Christian symbols and narratives insofar as he thinks that they are merely allegories with no disclosive or directive power, and

he is taken to misunderstand philosophical reason to the degree to which he reads it as reductively practical.

Now, Bubbio distinguishes himself from any number of Hegelian commentators by speaking without embarrassment about God. At the same time, Bubbio recognizes with Williams and others that Hegel's view is a revisionist one in which God's relation to the world and self is intrinsic rather than extrinsic. Hegel rules that the relation between God and world and God and self is not one of sovereignty in which God is everything, the world and the self nullities. That is, Bubbio admits that Hegel's basic construction is not theistic in the strict sense, although neither is it atheistic. This because of, rather than despite, Hegel's famous 'death of God' trope. This Hegelian trope, expressed in the *Differenzschrift* (1801) and further articulated in the *Phenomenology* and *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, is covered extraordinarily well in chapter 6. While for Bubbio the implications are that Hegel is convinced that an efficient-causal view of the God–world relation is enshrined in the classical philosophical and theological traditions, he focuses on Hegel's articulations of Christ and the Trinity. Hegel's view of Christ is more ontological than Kant's who makes Christ an exemplar of the holy will (14–23). Yet, at the same time, Hegel, much like Kant, supports a view of atonement in which Christ is directly responsible for our salvation or union with God (23–25). For Hegel, Bubbio argues, Christ—as a symbol—is more than an exemplar. Nonetheless, salvation or union is made possible not by the figure of Christ himself so much as the meaning of Christ being appropriated in and by the Christian community. If Hegel has to counter Kant's unsatisfying interpretation of the symbol or representation of Christ, the departure from Kant regarding the symbol of the Trinity is even more significant. The major Christian symbol discarded by Kant in *Religion* is the Trinity: Kant can think of no possible way in which this particular symbol can be philosophically, that is, ethically, redeemed or translated. In contrast, Hegel thinks that this symbol is the fundamental symbol of Christian faith, since it essentially maps the entire Christian narrative, which is the pretext for the dynamic network of concepts. Bubbio provides a synoptic account of Hegel's adoption and adaptation of the symbol of the Trinity in chapter 6, in which his brief is confined to the way in which Hegel's rendering of the Trinity finds its gravitational pull in a divine that is through and through relational. Overall, Bubbio is anxious to avoid entering the theological terrain, while at the same time suggesting that it is unlikely that Hegel's view will match that of the mainline theological tradition.

Bubbio has written a fine, if not necessarily ground-breaking, book on Hegel. The thesis is interesting, the argument clear, the knowledge displayed regarding Kant and Hegel is deep, and the acquaintance with secondary material is significant, although by no means exhaustive. I have, however, two reservations. First, even granted a significant measure of sympathy with Bubbio's post-Kantian

reading of Hegel's transcendental-revisionist metaphysical account of the God–world relation, it is not evident that Bubbio has proven his case. The synthesis between the revisionist metaphysical view of Williams and the social epistemology view of Pippin *et al.* does not do enough justice to both sides. Williams' revisionist metaphysical view of Hegel seems in the end to be dominated by Pippin's social epistemology. Second, and perhaps relatedly, there is the problem of the exclusive focus on teasing out Hegel's relation to Kant. While teasing out Hegel's relation to Kant is a necessary dimension in any Hegel interpretation that would claim to be adequate, it is not so clear that it ought to be the exclusive focus. Bubbio appears to entirely leave out Hegel's Spinozist heritage which plays an important role in Hegel's understanding of the nature of philosophy and the God–world and God–self relations. The objection here is not simply historical in nature. Rather, unless one accounts for the refraction of Spinoza throughout Hegel's philosophy, one is not truly in a position to pronounce, let alone articulate, the basic contours of Hegel's revisionist metaphysics and then proceed to square this with a post-metaphysical reading of Spirit guiding by mutual recognition.

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