



Book Review

## The Oxford Handbook of Hegel. By Dean Moyar (Ed.). Oxford University Press: Oxford, UK, 2017; 880 pp.; ISBN: 9780199355228

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Despite Georg W.F. Hegel's claim that "philosophy, at any rate, always comes too late" because, like the owl of Minerva, it "begins its flight only with the onset of dusk" [1] (p. 23), and beyond the contextual and contingent issues that might contribute to its return in auge, there exist important theoretical reasons to consider the question "why Hegel now and again?" still legitimate and current.

Although it may be held that we have witnessed a comeback of Hegel studies since the 1970s (see, e.g., [2,3]), it is also undeniable that the phenomenon is at its peak now. As Rocío Zambrana points out in Chapter 13 of the recently published *The Oxford Handbook of Hegel* (Oxford University Press, 2017, edited by Dean Moyar [4]), the debate around the status of Hegel's philosophy "developed as a result of readings divided on the question whether Hegel's idealism is metaphysical or non-metaphysical" [5] (p. 292). The terms of the discussion, however, might be sterile if not extended to their very significance and to assess and comprehend our present time and philosophical problems. After all, if the question "Hegel with or without metaphysics?" is simply "a question of accurate hierarchization, accentuation, and demarcation of partial answers" [6] (p. 127), it could appear like an umpteenth and redundant rhetorical exercise.

This is the main reason why the appearance of new studies which are not limited to the historical survey of German idealism and its champion, but broaden the attention to the multidisciplinary problems at stake in the Hegelian corpus, might contribute to reopening a dialogue between different branches and tendencies in philosophy. Considering the outcomes of these works as well as what Hegel's system prefigures, this task is not only interesting, but necessary. In the words of Herman Ley, in fact, the recent investigations about Hegel "have newly uncovered access to constellations of problems in fields concerning which it was generally agreed that Hegel certainly had nothing to say" [7] (p. 264).

The figure of Hegel, in other words, shows itself to be essential to providing a rigorous account of diverse theoretical problems and historical issues that conditioned—and still conditions—more recent philosophy. Think, for example, about the relevance of Hegelian thought—no matter if in a negative way—for the genesis and the triumph of analytical philosophy over monism and idealism (see, e.g., [8–10]), the very significance of the analytical turn (see, e.g., [11–13]), the evolution of 20th century political philosophy (see, e.g., [14,15]), and even for the role played by idealist philosophy in the development of science—particularly, of biology and natural history (see, e.g., [16–20]).<sup>2</sup>

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I have in mind (i) the 200th anniversary of the of the publication of the first edition of the Encyclopaedia of the Philosophical Sciences in 2017, which prefigured a wide number of events and publications around the figure and the doctrine of Hegel; (ii) the recent edition of the lectures given by Hegel in the 1820s, which allows to shed some new light on important aspects of Hegelian thought, such as his conception of aesthetics, religion, and history of philosophy.

A much earlier and surely not well-known work is Ritchie's 1893 *Darwin and Hegel* [21]: the author tries to overcome the anti-Darwinian prejudices of his time by showing the compatibility of evolutionism with Hegelian philosophy. In the words

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Whether the famous mottos *zurück zu Kant* and *mit Kant—über Kant hinaus* might one day, in light of these remarks, assume a Hegelian form (*zurück zu Hegel* and *mit Hegel—über Hegel hinaus*) is something that cannot be addressed in this review. However, if it is true that "no philosopher has suffered more from enthusiastic misrepresentation than Hegel, sometimes by professed followers, but more often by would-be critics" [22] (p. vii), I cannot exempt myself from assessing to what extent *The Oxford Handbook of Hegel* [4] provides a satisfactory reply to the query "why Hegel now and again?".

On one hand, the volume goes much beyond the statement of intent to present "the tremendous progress in understanding Hegel's project that has been made over the past decades" [23] (p. xxicx), for it provides a valuable summary of Hegel's complex view. The handbook is enriched by the contributions of eminent experts<sup>3</sup> as well as of emerging younger scholars—something which the editor must be praised for—, and many of its chapters will surely prove to be a reference in the future.

The extensive philosophical discussion is organized in seven sections, which follow the evolution of Hegel's thought, and which are detailed below.

- Part I. Hegel's Development in Jena (Chapters 1 and 2).
- Part II. *Phenomenology of Spirit* (Chapters 3–8).
- Part III. *The Science of Logic* (Chapters 9–14).
- Part IV. The *Encyclopaedia Project*, *Philosophy of Nature*, and Subjective Spirit (Chapters 15–19).
- Part V. Objective Spirit (Chapters 20–24).
- Part VI. Absolute Spirit (Chapters 25–28).
- Part VI. Hegel's Legacy (Chapters 29–34).

Despite the number of sections and chapters—a well-understandable plurality, given the broadness of the themes discussed in the Hegelian corpus and examined in this handbook—, the reader is always offered a clear survey of the whole project.

In Chapter 1, for example, Sandkaulen argues that "the genesis of the philosophy we now recognize as distinctively Hegelian" [24] (p. 5) leads back to the *Jenaer Periode*, and thus demonstrates that the meaning assumed by the new concept of the absolute as it is presented in the *The Difference between Fichte's and Schelling's System of Philosophy* indicates a breaking point in regard to Immanuel Kant, Friedrich H. Jacobi, Johann G. Fichte, and Friedrich W.J. Schelling. From a certain point of view, the *Difference* essay contains in nuce Hegel's programmatic reworking of philosophy "according to a method that will some day be recognized [ . . . ] as the only true method, identical with the content" [25] (p. 5).

This continuity throughout the Hegelian philosophical project is further developed in the chapters devoted to the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, and is essential to comprehending the evolution of the significance of the most important concepts of Hegel's philosophy, as well as to assess the actual relationship and position in the system of the *Phenomenlogy*, *The Science of Logic*, and the *Encyclopedia*. The thorough analysis offered by Dina Edmunts [26] to outline the idea of the *Phenomenology* makes Chapter 3 a useful instrument to go into the coils of dialectic. According to the author, the key to interpreting Hegel's 1807 work consists in the correct assessment of the concept of consciousness. The reader is shown that the holistic understanding of laws and principles which results from the section "Consciousness" [27] (pp. 58–103)—a clearly Hegelian topic—finds it foundation in the possibility for the subject "to have an understanding of her own subjecthood" [26] (p. 78).

of Ritchie, "Hegel's method of philosophising Nature could adjust itself the new scientific theory. The factors which Darwin assumes for his theory are Variation, Heredity, Struggle for Existence. now are not Heredity and Variation just particular forms of the categories of Identity and Difference, whose union and interaction produce the actually existing kinds of living beings, i.e., those determinate similarities and dissimilarities which constitute 'species'?" [21] (p. 56).

<sup>3</sup> It will be sufficient to mention the names of Terry Pinkard, Robert B. Pippin, Paul Redding, Birgit Sandkaulen, Ludwig Siep, and Robert Stern.

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In her essay about Hegel's logic, Zambrana also recognizes a rupture with the previous idealist tradition: her interest is to "assess the character of Hegel's distinctive transformation of Kantian subjectivity crucial to his insistence that intelligibility is a matter of *Geist*" [5] (p. 294). The conclusion of her work, however, opens the door to a different interpretation: Hegel would overcome the limits imposed by Kant's critical thought through the recognition that "the form of rationality that things express is [...] their subjectivity", where "'subject' [...] does not refer to a single epistemic, moral, social individual. *It is the process of actualization of things themselves*" [5] (p. 295; emphasis mine).

This stance, in fact, manifests some similarities with the work authored by Pippin [28], which stresses a strong connection with Kant. Ultimately, as Hegel himself puts it, "what for Kant is the result is for this philosophizing the immediate starting point" [29] (p. 40). Particularly, the great merit of Pippin is to show in what extent logic and metaphysics coincide by proposing an important interpretation of Kant—not only of Hegel. In this sense, going *zurück zu Hegel* shows itself to be an operation of high theoretical interest, whose relevance extends much beyond the figure of a thinker and allows to pave the way to new interpretations and discussions of other systems and movements.

Pippin lays the foundation for the idea that metaphysics is the science of possible sense-*making*, i.e., "making sense (understanding the possibility of determinate intelligibility) at the highest level of generality [28] (p. 209). For Kant as for Hegel, "to be *is* to be intelligible" [28] (p. 213)—even though, according to the latter, "the range of the logically possible is obviously far more extensive than the range of what Kant called the 'really possible'" [26] (p. 214). In other words, mutatis mutandis, what Hegel and Kant have in common is the conception of philosophy as a theory of meaning: without the presence of a system of significance, nothing could be "sign", i.e., nothing could be comprehended as meaning-carrier, nor could be recognized as such.<sup>4</sup>

Both because of the introductive nature of the Preliminary Conception,<sup>5</sup> and because of the foundational questions that it forces to deal with, Stern's Chapter 16 is another key-essay [31]. Given that logic is the science of thinking, Stern's analysis focuses on the diverse conceits of "thought" at stake in the *Vorbegriff*, which finally result in Hegel's typical objective conception: "the truth we are getting at here is not mere 'correctness' or representational adequacy, but rather the fundamental nature of things" [31] (p. 368)—the famous exposition of God as he is in his eternal essence [29]. The critical assessments provided in the conclusive part of the chapter range from a pragmatist reading of Hegel's claims à *la* Charles S. Pierce to a reasoned discussion of the supposed "presuppositionlessness" of the Logic. Even if these assessments might result too soft, they contribute to a good and necessary reflection on the problems that the text raises for Hegel and his general program, and surely offer enough sparks for more discussions.

Provided that "the state is the actuality of the ethical Idea" and "history is the process whereby the spirit assumes the shape of events and of immediate natural actuality" [1] (pp. 275, 374), by assessing Hegel's *Staatslehre* and philosophy of history, the reader is provided with further elements to understand the question about the currentness of Hegel.

Siep's essay, for example, tries to answer two questions, assumed as the guidelines of the chapter: "Is Hegel's state modern or traditional, liberal or authoritarian, or even totalitarian? How does the state relate to the market economy and religion, its main rivals in modern times?" [32] (pp. 515–516). The author's replies are the result of a careful analysis of Hegel's *Staatslehre*, of its relationships with ancient and modern philosophy (Aristotle, Thomas Hobbes, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, and obviously Kant and Fichte stand out among the most influencing references), and of its connection with the

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> I would argue that Pippin diverges from Brinkmann in this regard. For further discussion, see [12,30].

Stern correctly recalls that "as a philosopher committed to a systematic approach, Hegel was famously ambivalent about prefaces and introductions to his work" [31] (p. 365). Probably, the most famous example of such a reservation can be found in the *Phenomenology*: "it is customary to preface a work with an explanation of the author's aim, why he wrote the book, and the relationship in which he believes it to stand to other earlier or contemporary treatises on the same subject. In the case of a philosophical work, however, such an explanation seems not only superfluous but, in view of the nature of the subject-matter, even inappropriate and misleading" [27] (p. 1).

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historical context (think, e.g., about the French Revolution and the Congress of Vienna).<sup>6</sup> Even if Hegel's doctrine cannot be subsumed under any contemporary category in political philosophy (both because of his conception of monarchy and his anti-parliamentarism), his idea of the state is still important in many respects for current political philosophy.

Pinkard presents an interesting interpretation of Hegel's philosophy of history claiming that history is not guided by *Geist*, for "the necessity that philosophy claims to find in history is not that of a causal chain", and the conditions for such a necessity "are explicated in the *Logic* and in the *Encyclopedia*" [34] (p. 553). The keystone of this interpretation can be encountered in the concept of agency and in its role in Hegel's philosophy. Hegel shows, so argues Pinkard, "that agency has taken different shapes over time, and that there is a kind of progress to be found in the way it has taken shape" [29] (p. 538). Moreover, through the overview of Hegel's accounts for non-European civilizations, Greece, Rome, the *Germanen*, feudalism, and modernity, the author also explains the reasons why Hegel's philosophy of history cannot be considered a utilitarian, Kantian, or traditionally Aristotelian theory.

Indirectly related to this matter is the contribution of Redding [35]. The author reconstructs the history of ancient and medieval philosophy starting from the correct assumption that they are essential to understand Hegel's thought, and by stressing the importance of the concept of *Heimatlichkeit* ('at-homeness') for his Eurocentric vision of history. "Being at home in the world", which binds modern Europe to Greece, is the key-concept to comprehend the notion of freedom. This analysis allows Redding to explain why for Hegel "the eclipse of Greek 'speculative' philosophy and the move to more formal and abstract, and therefore 'Eastern', philosophies [ . . . ] was bound to the decline of the democratic life of the Greek polis" [35] (p. 617), and in which sense they resulted in medieval Catholicism. Redding's accounts for Hegel's "deplatonized Plato" and "de-empiricized Aristotle" are also of particular interest.

Part VII is probably the section where the question "why Hegel now and again?" is answered in a more explicit way, for it deals with the legacy of Hegel and Hegelianism.

Alison Stone discusses the reception of Hegel in the 20th century French philosophy in Chapter 31 [36]. Special attention is payed to the figures of Alexandre Kojève, Jean-Paul Sartre, Simone de Beauvoir, Frantz Fanon, and Luce Irigaray, and to the concept of recognition: this is the red line that binds the first apogee of Hegel in France to existentialism and post-structuralism. The author shows, for example, how the lord/bondsman phenomenological figure, which is fundamental for Kojève to introduce the notion of desire and to give dialectic a social and political value, is reinterpreted to provide an account of women's oppression (as in Beauvoir) or of racial oppression (as in Fanon), or to construct an ethics of sexual difference (Irigaray).

Chapter 33, authored by deVries [37], offers a thorough review of the renewed interest for Hegel in analytic philosophy, sheds light on the birth and rise of the Pittsburgh school, draws the differences between Wilfrid S. Sellars', John McDowell's, and Robert B. Brandom's allegiance to Hegel, and discusses how the three thinkers conjugate their claims about realism, transcendental idealism, and inferentialism.

Notwithstanding the importance of the essays included in the volume and its general good value, it is worth noting that other elements bind to recognize that *The Oxford Handbook of Hegel* [4] does not always provide satisfactory replies to the question "why Hegel now and again?". In fact, even if the reader is invited to recognize Hegel "not merely as an irritant but also as a positive interlocutor" [36] (p. 699), being "one of the most significant and profound contributors to the canon of Western philosophy, someone whom we can with profit study and learn from" [37] (p. 763), the work overlooks some aspects of the Hegel reception that are crucial for the recent history of philosophy.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>6</sup> With regards to the French Revolution, I recommend an interesting essay by Fluss [33], which is accessible to all readers.

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Think, for example, about the movement known as British idealism: even though recent studies have dealt with the historically inaccurate view that it was a mere form of neo-Hegelianism (see, e.g., [9,10,30]), still many important pieces of work are inclined to present the movement as essentially Hegelian (see, e.g., [38–46]). Since analytic philosophy was born as a revolt aimed to contrast Kant, Hegel, and the British idealists (see, e.g., [47]), and given the undoubtable success of Russell's and Moore's new approach in the 20th century philosophy, the reader could expect at least a detailed discussion of British idealism. It is true that deVries's essay [37] deals indirectly with this matter, as I have sketched above. However, taking into account the multifaceted outcomes of the British idealists would have allowed to provide a more complete picture of Hegel's legacy. It is unfortunate that the essay commissioned on this topic did not come through: the birth of analytic philosophy is related to the eclipse of idealism in Great Britain, and a deeper acquaintance with the history of British idealism could shed new light on this fundamental turn for contemporary thought, as I have tried to show elsewhere [30,48] (see also [8,9]).

Another idealist school which unfortunately is mentioned only *en passant* is Italian idealism. Italian idealists such as Benedetto Croce or Giovanni Gentile enriched the understanding of Hegel's philosophy, and it can be said that "the contribution of Italian scholarship to the study and dissemination of Hegelian thought played a role comparable to, if not eclipsing, those of other European countries" [49] (p. 223): it might have been interesting to renew the interest of the public for the reception of Hegel in Italy.

It is important to note that these remarks are not only about the history of philosophy: rather, they can contribute theoretically to present new Hegelian stances. William J. Mander has observed, for example, that while "realist and pragmatist philosophy not only modelled itself on science, but engaged with it at all levels", the British idealists "had little interest in science", "failed almost entirely to engage" with the new developments in logic and in science "and as a result they were hopelessly left behind" [9] (p. 547 and p. 551). If, as Mander argues [9], the decline of idealism (at least in Great Britain) had to do with the impossibility to keep pace with scientific progress in its diverse manifestations, an interesting question to pose concerns how much its Hegelian roots influenced this deficiency—and it is reasonable to think that they did influence it a lot. As Taylor puts it,

the sciences had already in his own day broken the bounds of the synthesis which Hegel's commentary imposed on them, and although the possibility always remains theoretically of recommencing a synthesizing commentary with each new important discovery, the development of the sciences has made the whole project of a philosophy of nature seem futile and misguided. [2] (p. 543)

In this sense, for example, Friedrich A. Trendelenburg's and Eduard von Hartmann's criticisms of dialectic (see, e.g., [51,52]), as well as Johann F. Herbart's and Jakob F. Fries' reservations about Hegel's philosophy of nature (see, e.g., [53,54]) would have probably deserved a mention or a short discussion in the handbook. Their interpretation of Hegel's dialectic as a contraption that has nothing to do with science, in fact, contributed to the reinforcement of anti-idealist approaches in certain philosophical environments, and was even taken into account by the British idealists for their interpretation of Hegelian philosophy.

The impression that this discussion might have been included in Part IV is further endorsed by the fact that the case study discussed by Rand [55] deals with the same subject-matter at stake in Herbart's review of Hegel's *Encyclopedia* [53] and in Fries' pamphlet "Nichtigkeit der Hegelschen Dialektik" [54]. The outcomes, in fact, are very different: while for Rand Hegel's argument for the self-determination of nature "involves a complex and detailed engagement with contemporary scientific theory" [55] (p. 403), both Herbart and Fries criticise its artificiality and believe that it is unscientific. This disconformity is

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>7</sup> It has even been argued that Hegel's philosophy could be labelled as realist, but the discussion of this point of view would require too much attention and cannot be carried out in this review. See [50].

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mainly due to a different interpretation of the Hegel-Newton-Kepler relationship, which Rand briefly sketches, and which also results interesting to put into context other science-related issues dealt with in the *Encyclopedia*.<sup>8</sup>

This is obviously not the right place to discuss who provides the most correct interpretation of Hegel: rather, this review would simply like to inspire further investigations about this matter. As I have mentioned above, however, the recent comeback of Hegel is related, among other elements, to the affirmation of new perspectives concerning his philosophy of nature. Their importance is so meaningful that, for example, it led John H. Zammitto to argue that "we have to be extremely careful in crediting so-called 'transcendental *Naturforschung*' as authentically Kantian in any sense that would make Schelling (or Reinhold or Fichte or Hegel) *not* Kantian" [20] (p. 323).

This does not obviously mean that the role played by Hegel has the same importance for the history of science as other philosophical schools do, especially in the 20th century. As Massimo Ferrari and Hans-Johann Glock claim, "nobody will deny that the reconstruction between the philosophy of science and the history of science is deeply connected to the Neo-Kantian tradition" [59] (p. 284), which "actually influenced some of the Germanophone pioneers of analytic philosophy" [60] (p. 72). In any case, as Zammitto suggests [20], by reconciling Hegel with science and its history it might be possible to bring back to light theories and doctrines of "minor thinkers" who were obscured by the cumbersome shadow of Hegel's statue, and who were buried by it when it tumbled down.

Using a metaphor of Michael Friedman [61], we do not know whether *the ways parted* in Davos, or before, or in another place (see [61–63]): it can be held, however, that the impossibility for idealism to engage with the progress of science did influence this rupture. The very significance of the remarks briefly sketched above consists only in recognizing that Hegel was not detached from the progress of science, as it has wrongly been assumed for a long time. Indirectly, this advance in the interpretation of his doctrine can help banish the ghost of an absolutely anti-logical and anti-scientific philosophy: as Taylor puts it, while his central thesis is dead, in a sense, "Hegel can be placed in the line of development which leads up to the contemporary ways of understanding language" [2] (p. 567). We know that the history of philosophy is a history of misunderstandings; however, if one day this particular misreading will be unveiled, and if further studies will be able to show what contemporary philosophy (especially analytic philosophy) still can learn from Hegel (see, again, [13]), perhaps this advance will also allow to *reunite the two paths*.

To conclude, despite these critical remarks, for the reasons exposed above, *The Oxford Handbook of Hegel* [4] must undoubtedly be considered a remarkable achievement for every serious student of Hegel. Certainly, as I have showed, it does not provide a complete and definitive answer to the question "why Hegel now and again?": new and more specific studies are surely necessary to shed light on those aspects of Hegel's philosophy that have not been dealt with in this work. Nevertheless, this incompleteness is more a limitation of philosophy—it always comes too late!—than of Moyar's work. After all, like Friedrich Schiller said once, "wenn die Könige baun, haben die Kärrner zu tum" [64].

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An interesting case is Paolucci's conviction that Hegel's definition of light represents an extraordinary and rigorous anticipation of what physical theory would determine some decades after his death [56]. The author praises Hegel both for defining light as the simplest universal quality of nature ("the abstract self of matter" [57] (p. 91))—thus anticipating Albert Einstein—and for denying the superiority of the undulatory theory over the corpuscular theory—thus anticipating quantum physics. It is not my intention to brand Hegel as scientifically incompetent like Herbart and Fries do [53,54], and I understand that it was not Brand's intention to deal with this issue. However, I honestly believe that it is more realistic to think that the triadicity imposed by the necessity of dialectic—not a supposed Hegel's quantum clairvoyance—brought to the actual order of the notions exposed in the *Encyclopedia*: for this reason, discussing further the problem might have contributed both historically and theoretically to its clarification. See also [30,58].

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