

sophy can be described as an integrative pluralism, “where the important point is to highlight the pluralism of the different ontological layers or partial and relative frameworks that set the parameters for particular contexts of discovery that are all limited and abstract with respect to the whole, but necessarily so” (Brinkmann 2011, pp. 261-2). From this point of view, dialectic could propose new categories, such as those related to a new integration of nature and technology. Nonetheless, Brinkmann is pessimistic about the integrative *capacity* of Hegelian dialectic, especially in contemporary Western democracies. Brinkmann hints at the clash between different ethical substances, suggesting that our situation today is more akin to a state of self-alienation than to a unified ethical life. Even though Brinkmann is indubitably right in the evaluation of our contemporary ethical world, I do not think this undermines the explanatory capacity of dialectic as such. From this point of view, Brinkmann overlooks the relevance of dialectic as dimension of objective self-knowledge. Hegelian philosophy is today even more instructive not because it would offer an integrative model to solve ethical conflicts, as because it provides rational subjects with the critical assessment of their historical, political and social context. This is a capacity of critical self-knowledge and not an ethical model of integration. The relevance of the former lies in its being a methodological self-reflection that guides individuals to seek for the truth and for objectivity even when everything seems to be beyond any rational attempt of objective reconstruction.

(Elisa Magri)

MARKUS GABRIEL, *Transcendental Ontology*, Continuum, London-New York, 2011, pp. 174; ISBN 9781441116291.

How is it possible to think of the world as such after Kant’s ‘Copernican Revolution’? Assuming the orientation indicated by this question, Gabriel’s collection of essays on German idealism presents itself with the ambition of providing not so much a

scholarly investigation on what the post-Kantian idealists would have truly said as a legitimation of a philosophical program which uses the works of the classics in order to evaluate some tendencies of the contemporary debate (naturalism, the stress on the sociality of the norms, the return to ontology) and lay out the A.'s own theory.

The name the A. gives to the program of his theory is 'transcendental ontology'. To the elucidation of this notion is committed a long and dense introduction (pp. vii-xxxii), which deals with several issues: the reconstruction of the context of the past and the present of ontology, the difference between the epistemological and the ontological question, the critique to the actual return of French philosophy to ontology, the anticipation of the arguments regarding the basic claims of the volume (the contingency of necessity and the incompleteness of every domain of objects) and finally the justification of its interpretive parameters through the recourse to an ontology of the texts.

In a background dimension, the context of the problematic status of ontology is set in Descartes' gesture of establishing the primacy of the epistemological question of our access to the world over the ontological one. In the foreground stays the conflict between analytic and continental philosophy. While the former remains more or less consciously attached to the self-representation of the modern philosophy, the latter wants to rehabilitate the question of Being against the post-Cartesian epistemologism. Nevertheless both ways that have dominated the scene of the twentieth-century philosophy would share an opposition to the post-Kantian idealism. The critical move the A. undertakes against such common suspicion and against the Kantian presupposition of the recent American *Hegel-Renaissance* consists in interpreting the post-Kantian idealism as a transcendental ontology, i.e. as a theory concerning the ontological conditions of our condition of access to what there is. This theory is based on two assumptions: a) the subject, no matter how conceived, exists, in the sense that it is part of the world to which it is at the same time referred; b) the analysis of

the concept of existence has a methodological priority over the inquiry into the subjective conditions for the access to existence. The justification of these assumptions requires a reversal of orientation. In order to answer to the epistemological question (how is it possible to refer through judgment to something that is not judgment?) we need first to answer to the question of a transcendental ontology about how can the world refer to itself through the reflection of finite thinking beings. In general, what makes interesting the actualization of the post-Kantian idealism is its goal of creating a new ontology in which freedom turns out to be the very meaning of Being.

Following McDowell, the A. sketches the path from Kant's metaphysics of intentionality to the post-Kantian one and reaches a further description of the post-Kantian ontology in terms of "idealism of sense", understood as a high-order theory (capable of referring to our mode of referring to objects, p. xii) whose content is objectivity, i.e. the very possibility for states of affairs to appear as objects for the finite thinking. In force of an interpretation of Hegel's dictum "the true is the whole", the A. determines the concept of 'sense' in the way that follows: there is no object (all that a first-order theory has to deal with) which does not include the possibility of being an object in view, that is an object appearing in a domain, on which a high-order theory can reflect.

By discussing the relationship between transcendental philosophy as logic of appearance and ontology in Badiou, the A. points out, on one side, his agreement with Badiou's claim that the "All" (i.e. the totality of physical states of affairs factually available to us) does not exist, whereas there are many worlds; on the other side, he disagrees with Badiou's identification of ontology with a set-theory. This move, in fact, would neglect the difference between an ontology of quantity and a "logic of sense". On this regard it seems to me that Gabriel's argument lacks perspicuity under three aspects: a) whether ontology, understood as a theory of multiple domains of objects, can be defined at the same time and under the same respect as a logic of

sense; in other words, whether a ‘domain of objects’ is interchangeable with a ‘field of sense’; b) whether Deleuze’s concept of a “logic of sense” is meant to refer to Badiou’s logic of appearance or to the A.’s own ontological project; c) what concept of logic is meant when the priority of ontology over logic is asserted.

The introduction goes on with a “determinacy” argument to claim that not even the “Whole” exists and employs the argument of the regress *ad infinitum* (in the form of the Third-man argument) to refute the claim to the existence of the domain of domains. The arguments of this *pars destruens* allow the A. to integrate them with a *pars construens*, which consists in an argument concerning what he calls the ontological fact of contingency and in a general characterization of philosophical thinking as paradoxical attempt to grasp the domain of domains. The picture of the program of the transcendental ontology, centered around the attempt to reformulate “Being as Being” in terms of “Being as self-reflection of the world”, is at this point sufficiently defined to leave room for the interpretation displayed in the chapters of the book.

The first chapter – *The Ontology of Knowledge* (pp. 1-59) – has three aims: a) emphasizing the key-role that skepticism plays in the motivation of a post-Kantian ontology; b) reconstructing Hegel’s conception of the absolute identity in order to highlight the transition from Kant’s transcendental epistemology, which would amount to an unreflective ontology, into a transcendental, therefore reflective, ontology of the subject; c) verifying the concrete development of Hegel’s ontology in his anthropology, considered as the place of the genealogical explanation of the structure of intentionality (i.e. consciousness).

The first section defines metaphysics as the project of a theory of the totality which makes claims on the knowledge of the world as such and dwells on the metaphysical lesson of the skepticism: the Absolute or the Whole cannot be known neither factually nor in principle with epistemic certainty as if it were an object. Such lesson provides an introduction to Hegel’s specu-

lative point of view, as it is expressed by the program of the *Science of Logic*: to expose a critique of all the categories which have claimed to define the Absolute along the history of philosophy. The conclusion of this program consists in the awareness that only under the guidance of the dialectical method philosophy can reach an adequate conception of the Absolute. Gabriel's description of the general task of Hegel's logic suffers from three limits: a) the *Darstellung* of thinking is taken as a mere "series of definitions" and not as a *process*; b) this series, from the first member (Being) to the last one (absolute Idea), has no other meaning than that of a logic of failure; c) the method of the 'determinate negation' is reduced to a matter of fight between theories, so that it would denote at best the *metatheoretical* reflection on the categories of the *history* of philosophy, whereas the scientific aspect of the *proper, immanent* reflection of thought-determinations finds no mention in the A.'s account.

The second section argues for three points: in first place, it shows Hegel's systematic objection to Kant's model of objectivity; in second place, Hegel's absolute identity is translated into the concept of a universal dimension, wherein the differences as such can be produced, without itself being a different term; in third place, the critical potential of that concept is praised against McDowell's appeal to the culture of *common sense* and in general against every illicit attempt to universalize a pre-philosophical image of thought.

The third section analyzes the pathological structure of representation through the reconstruction of the genesis of spirit in the soul, regarded as expressive dimension of corporeality. The argumentative aim of this section is problematic for three reasons: a) it is not clear whether the A. holds that the subject-object dichotomy necessarily descends from a cleavage which is internal to the sentient monad or it is the fictional product of a theoretical reflection about that cleavage; b) it fails to consider that what is relevant from the *Encyclopaedia's* point of view is not the genesis or the natural beginning of the spirit but its concept, while the confusion between the temporal development of

reading and the conceptual or scientific development of the exposition of the encyclopedic text leads the A. to interpret the 'representation' as a pathological phenomenon just because it is treated *after* the mental illness; c) with the goal of fighting the ghost of the Cartesian epistemology, the A. loses sight of the fact that 'representation' does not belong to the stage of the dichotomy of consciousness (phenomenology), rather to the sphere of intelligence (psychology).

The second chapter - *Schelling's Ontology of Freedom* (pp. 60-101) – sets out to elaborate a justification of an ontology of freedom through a theory of predication. The first section contains a comparison between the concept of Being in the late Schelling and the late Heidegger. Both thinkers turn out to have three aspects in common: a) the intention to account for the logic concept of Being (the inseparability of Being and determinacy) by means of the historical concept of Being (Being as Event); b) the conviction of the impossibility to reduce Being to thinking (the unforesightability of Being); c) the project of a philosophy oriented by the ontological primacy of the future. The second section studies three connections of Schelling's positive philosophy: the relation between judgment and Being, between judgment and existence, between man and God. The A. is interested in showing that the human being is the subject of the metaphysical question and that 'God' and 'creation' are just the religious names Schelling assigns to the ontological structures which are not in our hands, that is the historical facticity of the human subjectivity or freedom.

The third chapter – *Contingency or Necessity? Schelling vs. Hegel* (pp. 102-136) – is meant to examine the difference between the two thinkers with respect to the determination of the modal status of the structure of the logical space and to argue in favour of Schelling against Hegel. The first section defends a non-metaphysical concept of the Absolute in two phases. First, it rebuilds the dialectic of the absolute in the chapter 'The Absolute' in Hegel's logic of essence and ends up interpreting the Hegelian absolute as a "concept of contrast" (p. 108) between the

horizon constituted by the totality of the network of relations and our conditioned way of conceptualizing it. Second, through a discussion of the three syllogisms concluding the *Encyclopedia* and a clarification of the relation between speculative exposition and language, it comes to characterize the absolute spirit as the self-consciousness of the absolute Idea in the activity of finite thinkers who attempt to reconstruct their position in the contexts of nature and spirit they find before them. The second section is concerned with the modal status of the logical space in Hegel and Schelling. According to the A., both of them develop a theory of the logical space whose main premise is that necessity is only necessity *ex post*. Hegel would like to demonstrate the absolute necessity of contingency. Therefore the logical space is not an *Ursachverhalt* but a *posit*, i.e. a presupposition which is generated by the reflection of a general theory on the limits of every theorizing. Necessity means the holding together of all the elements of a theoretical high-order system (the domain of domains) where nothing can be otherwise; contingency is the experience of the limits of every theory which is not able to call into question its own presuppositions. Against Hegel, Schelling argues for the contingency of necessity. What can be presented in the language of *every* theory depends on a Being which is always already there before thinking (the unforethinkable Being) and on the so-called facticity of reason, i.e. the original contingency of the willing to pass from the unforethinkable Being into determinacy (dimension of judgment and theory). The actuality of the unforethinkable Being is determined as “belated necessity” when it is posed by the contingency of our will as the presupposition X of the predicative frameworks opened up by our thinking.

In my opinion the defense of Schelling against Hegel does not succeed for at least four reasons. First, the A. does not rigorously distinguish between formal necessity, which he simply calls an “oscillation” (p. 102) between reality and possibility, real necessity (presupposing contingency) and absolute necessity (producing contingency out of itself). Second, it is left totally

unexplained the nexus between the temporal meaning conveyed by the expression *ex post* and the logical status of necessity. Third, the A. refers the modal determinations to the notion of “theory” in general, but in the fact he interprets Hegel through a precise model of theory (the formation of domains of objects through the more or less explicit stipulation of rules), which is hardly compatible with Hegel’s concept of theory as system, wherein those modal determinations come to be grounded. Fourth, Schelling’s critique of the absolute necessity and the blind spots of *every* theory is based on a conception of thinking that the A. takes for granted without confronting himself with Hegel’s theory of objective thinking. Finally, I don’t see how is it possible to claim the *ultimate* character of contingency as a limit of thinking without at the same time committing oneself to state the *necessity* of this “fact”.

In sum, Gabriel’s book offers, on one side, a selective reading of the German idealism which brilliantly shows how broad is the critical import of such philosophical movement toward the presuppositions of the contemporary positions, first of all the separation between epistemology and ontology. On the other side, the circumstance that the A. continues to use the conceptual devices of the positions he criticizes (e.g. accessibility, first-order and high-order theory, domains of objects, logical space, existence as identifiability of a member of a domain) seems in decisive points to impede the effective creativity of interpretation that his ontology of the texts is meant to reach. Paradoxically, one may wonder if a stronger fidelity to the constraints of the textual object, especially the Hegelian one, would have called into question the validity of those devices and therefore elicited creativity in a more radical way.

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