

With or Without Monism?

A Roadmap to the Contemporary Appeal of Hegel's Metaphysics

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ABSTRACT: The aim of this article is to provide a roadmap to assess the contemporary appeal of Hegel's metaphysics. I will take the contemporary debate between "metaphysical", "revised-metaphysical" and "post-Kantian" or "transcendental" interpretations of Hegel as a framework. I will claim that, more or less explicitly, all of the readings involved in the debate establish the contemporary interest of Hegel's metaphysics by comparing it to a specific kind of philosophical theory, either present or absent in the wider contemporary (Anglo-American) philosophical conversation. Paragraphs 2 and 3 will be devoted to understanding these meta-philosophical commitments, presenting a brief reconstruction of the history of the consideration of metaphysics in XX- and XXI-century Anglo-American philosophy, and a brief presentation of the three main interpretations in the debate. In paragraph 4, I will provide insights on whether Hegel's notion of metaphysics actually corresponds to one of those suggested in the debate, and whether it could consequently be considered of contemporary relevance. I will hold that Hegel's metaphysics not only exceeds all of the three interpretations in the debate, but also contains insights that challenge the contemporary meta-philosophical assumption of what should be "in" and what should be "out" in metaphysics.

KEYWORDS: Hegel; Metaphysics; Analytic metaphysics; Monism.

1. Introduction

The aim of this article is to provide a roadmap to assess the contemporary appeal of Hegel's metaphysics.

I will take the contemporary debate between "metaphysical", "revised-metaphysical" and "post-Kantian" or "transcendental" interpretations of Hegel as a framework. The debate, started almost half a century ago, is now experiencing a revival¹. The merit of this long running dispute, other than the one of touching on central and yet controversial aspects of Hegel's work, is the one of attempting to put Hegelian philosophy in dialogue with contemporary philosophical theories – or, at least, with the most popular ones in the context

¹ The question concerning the nature of Hegel metaphysics regained center stage with the publication of PIPPIN, Robert. **Hegel's Realm of Shadows: Logic as Metaphysics in the "Science of Logic"**. Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2018. See also NG, Karen. Science of Logic as Critique of Judgment? Reconsidering Pippin's Hegel. **European Journal of Philosophy**, vol. 27, n. 4, 2019, pp. 1055-1064; KREINES, James, Systematicity and Philosophical Interpretation: Hegel, Pippin, and Changing Debates. **Australasian Philosophical Review**, vol. 2, n. 4, 2020, pp. 393-402, and REDDING, Paul. Robert Pippin's Hegel as an Analytically Approachable Philosopher. **Australasian Philosophical Review**, vol. 2, n. 4, 2020, pp. 355-364.



of XX- and XXI-century Anglo-American philosophy – in order to assess Hegel’s today relevance.

I will claim that, more or less explicitly, all of the readings involved in the debate connect and/or compare Hegel’s metaphysics to a specific kind of philosophical theory, either present or absent in the wider contemporary philosophical (and metaphysical) conversation: whereas the “traditional metaphysical” reading attributes to Hegel a kind of metaphysics which is not present among nowadays metaphysical proposals, therefore claiming its out-datedness, both “revised-metaphysical” and “post-Kantian” readings claim the relevance of Hegelian metaphysics by likening it to theories defended today.

This operation requires, for each reading, a specific notion of what should be considered “metaphysics”, and a clear idea of which kind of metaphysics is out-dated, worthless to pursue today, and which is instead contemporarily relevant, and therefore possible and interesting to carry on.

Paragraphs 2 and 3 will be devoted to understanding these meta-philosophical commitments.

In paragraph 2 I briefly reconstruct the history of the consideration of metaphysics in XX- and XXI-century Anglo-American philosophy.

This survey will show that, aside for the unfortunate “middle period” in which metaphysics altogether was considered as utterly meaningless, Anglo-American philosophy was characterized by a continuing interest in metaphysics, dominated by two distinct and even opposed meta-philosophical indications of what the scope of metaphysics should be, and of what kind of metaphysics is worth pursuing, in the sense of “contemporary relevant”.

Following Dean Zimmermann’s classification of contemporary trends in metaphysics, I will call these two “analytic” and “new wave” metaphysics².

Further, I will also hold that both “new wave” and “analytic” metaphysics exclude a set of questions which belonged to the field of “traditional” metaphysics, more or less consciously inheriting Russell’s and Moore’s critique of British Idealism as nonsensical and out-dated. Namely, “new wave” and “analytic metaphysics” exclude questions concerning the “ultimate” foundation of reality. It will be shown how these questions are considered to immediately imply the denial of the consistence of particulars, as did British Idealism – at least in Russell and Moore’s critique of it.

² ZIMMERMANN, D. W. Prologue: Metaphysics after the Twentieth Century. In: _____ (Org.). **Oxford Studies in Metaphysics**. Vol. I. New York: Oxford University Press, 2004, pp. ix-xxii.

In paragraph 3 I will illustrate the three main lines of interpretation present in the debate on Hegel's metaphysics. This will highlight a clear correspondence between: 1) the notion of metaphysics attributed to Hegel by "traditional metaphysical" readings and the one exemplified by British Idealism 2) the "new-wave" notion of metaphysics and the one attributed to Hegel by "post-Kantian" interpretations 3) the "analytic" notion of metaphysics and the one attributed to Hegel by "revised metaphysical" interpretations.

In paragraph 4, I will provide insights on whether Hegel's notion of metaphysics actually corresponds to one of the two suggested by "post-Kantian" and "revised metaphysical" interpreters, and whether it could consequently be considered of contemporary relevance.

2. Metaphysics in Analytic Philosophy

The stereotypical image of English-speaking philosophy from the XXth century on sees it as a radically non-metaphysical, when not anti-metaphysical, enterprise.

This prejudice stems from two elements, usually seen as part of a historical continuum: first, Russell and Moore's radical condemnation of British Idealism and, with it, of Hegel and other figures that the continental tradition would consider as exponents of what it would call "metaphysics", and, second, the Neo-empiricist claim for the nonsensical character of all metaphysical questions, epitomized in Carnap's renowned definition of metaphysical propositions as "pseudo-propositions"³.

Combined with analytical inquiry's concentration on language and conceptual clarification, immediately identified with the attempt – typical of the specific current known as ordinary language philosophy – of dissolving metaphysical questions into verbal disputes, these elements formed the common misconception that analytic philosophy was unconcerned with, when not openly hostile to, metaphysical and ontological inquiry⁴. For this reason, the fact that between the end of the XXth century and the first years of XXIst century metaphysics has become an established discipline in analytic philosophy is often regarded as a surprising and even inexplicable event.

³ CARNAP, Rudolf. *Überwindung der Metaphysik durch logische Analyse der Sprache*. *Erkenntnis*, vol. 2, 1931, pp. 219–241.

⁴ As aptly remarked in Zimmerman, the term "analytic" itself is extremely ambiguous and seems unable to find, even after so many years, a clear and unanimous definition. I will here use the term rather loosely, knowing that it is actually not a label clearly identifying any specific methodology or philosophy separate, for instance, from the continental one.

Many contributions in the recent years have highlighted how this historical reconstruction is, other than exceptionally naïve⁵, nothing but a myth.

It is in fact false that English-speaking philosophy has been free of metaphysical preoccupation since its foundation, whenever we chose to date its beginning and to whichever philosophical figure – be it Gottlob Frege, or Bertrand Russell – we chose to link it⁶.

As known, Frege's logicism implied very heavy metaphysical presuppositions (which he partly left up to his successors to fully defend and demonstrate), amongst which probably the claim for a correspondence between grammatical categories and categories of being, and the Platonistic claim for the existence of mathematical entities on a “transcendent”, third plane other than that of the mind and that of the material were the heaviest.

Also a defender of logicism, although with very different objectives as Frege and being rather critical of him, Russell also engaged in a form of Platonistic realism, claiming initially that “every name or term” would “stand for something”, and later restricting his realism to universals and sense-data through his theory of types and his theory of description⁷.

Only within a very limited period of time, commonly known as the “middle-period” and going roughly from the 30s to the 50s, did Anglo-American philosophy commit to a clear disengagement from all metaphysical or ontological problems⁸. Even though this is usually the most “publicity-catching” period of the history of analytic philosophy, it would be a mistake to take it *pars pro toto*⁹. In these years, the mainstream of analytic philosophy was

⁵ Several authors have highlighted that the reading of the history of the consideration of metaphysics in terms of the opposition of a “continental” and an “analytic” side can be misleading, because, while this gives the impression that “continental” and “analytic” were two distinct but in themselves coherent blocks, the terms are actually very ambiguous and conceal several internal differences on both sides. See ZIMMERMAN, Prologue, 2004; NUZZO, Angelica. Introduction: Dialectical Appropriations. In: _____. (Org.). **Hegel and the Analytic Tradition**. London: Bloomsbury, 2011, pp. 1-11; and VARZI, A. Ontologia e Metafisica. In: D'Agostini, F., Vassallo, N. (Org.). **Storia della Filosofia Analitica**. Torino: Einaudi, 2002.

⁶ See for instance SIMONS, P. Metaphysics in Analytic Philosophy. In: Beaney, M. (Org.). **The Oxford Handbook of Analytic Philosophy**. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013, pp. 709-728.

⁷ Contrary to what the common myth would have it, then, the attention to linguistic and semantic form does not necessarily imply a detachment from metaphysics, and could instead prove to be – as it has been the case for Russell's theory of description, for instance – a very useful tool for metaphysical inquiry. On this, see VARZI, Ontologia e Metafisica, 2002.

⁸ As remarked in ZIMMERMAN, Prologue, 2004 and in SIMONS, Metaphysics in Analytic Philosophy, 2013, it also and only in these years that the myth of analytic philosophy being altogether anti-metaphysical became widespread. In these years, the term “analytic” became equivalent to “non-metaphysical”, whereas originally the label was introduced by Russell to identify its opposition to Bradley's hostility to analyticity and to his denying of the consistence of particulars. As remarked by Simons, it is also important to note that parallel to the Vienna Circle the Lvov-Warsaw School carried on a positively metaphysical research program, destined to have great and long-lasting impact on the development of so-called “analytic philosophy”.

⁹ I am borrowing here Simon's expression (SIMONS, Metaphysics in Analytic Philosophy, 2013).

defined, on the one hand, by Logical Positivism and, on the other, by ordinary language philosophy.

The first is rooted in Vienna Circle's attempt at formulating "a clear principle by which bad metaphysics (...) could be exposed as such"¹⁰. This was then infamous verification principle, according to which only two types of propositions are meaningful: the truths of logic, and propositions which could be empirically verified (i.e. through the senses). As neither logical truths, nor empirically verifiable propositions, all metaphysical propositions were then considered as devoid of "cognitive meaning", and worthless of any philosophical consideration. This was the base for Carnap's renowned claim that "all metaphysical propositions are pseudo-propositions"¹¹.

Ordinary language philosophy, even though with slightly different premises, shared this attitude, and assumed Wittgenstein's dismissal of metaphysical problems as pseudo-problems as a reason to steer clear from ontological and metaphysical inquiry altogether, concentrating on the clarification of concepts and meanings implied in our everyday language expressions instead.

Several reconstructions give Willard V.O. Quine the merit of having re-introduced the term "ontology" in the analytic discourse, and of having therefore made way to contemporary analytic metaphysics¹².

Around the 1930s Quine introduced the renowned notion of "ontological commitment", claiming that any theory formulated in predicative logic is committed to the existence of those entities on which its bound variables need to range over in order for the theory's sentences to be true¹³. This means that for Quine, contrary to what Carnap held, the choice of a framework or theory cannot depend on mere pragmatic considerations of what

¹⁰ SIMONS, *Metaphysics in Analytic Philosophy*, 2013, p. 717.

¹¹ It should be noted that Carnap's main point against metaphysics was not simply that metaphysics' propositions are meaningless, but rather that they invited a misunderstanding with reference to what can and cannot be done through language. Namely, Carnap held that metaphysical propositions were meant as "external", that is, as committed to the existence of what they claimed "outside", or "independently" of their (linguistic) framework or theory within which they are formulated. This specific commitment to "external" questions was what made metaphysics worthless of consideration, because they were dedicated to the impossibly circular task of verifying the very same framework they used. Correctly understood, metaphysical discourse *could* be used to raise pragmatic questions as to which framework would be best to use, but for nothing ontologically more ambitious than this.

¹² See for instance SCHAFFER, Jonathan, *On What Grounds What*. In: Chalmers, D.; Manley, D.; Wasserman, R. (Orgs.). **Metametaphysics**. New York: Oxford University Press, 2009, p. 347-383; SIMONS, *Metaphysics in Analytic Philosophy*, 2013; and PRICE, Huw, *Carnap, Quine and the Fate of Metaphysics*. **Electronic Journal of Analytic Philosophy**, vol. 5, n. 1, 1997.

¹³ "A theory is committed to those and only those entities to which the bound variables of the theory must be capable of referring in order that the affirmations made in the theory be true". QUINE, Willard Van Orman. *On What There Is*. **The Review of Metaphysics**, vol. 2, n. 1, 1948, p. 33.

would be “best” to quantify over in a determinate context. Rather, the ontological commitment of a theory is fixed and used to determine its preferability in comparison with other frameworks. This gave the impression of a very strong metaphysical implication: it seemed that Quine’s criterion of ontological commitment would imply a commitment to an “external” notion of existence, independent of the framework (and its pragmatic interest) and regarding the “world itself”. Actually, Quine never meant to use the consideration of ontological commitment as a tool for answering the “metaphysical” question as to what *really* exists in the world. Rather, he thought of ontological commitment as a tool meant to make explicit what our best theories on the world imply, without any question regarding the correspondence between ontological commitments and the world¹⁴.

Even though Quine did indeed have the merit of rehabilitating ontology (if not metaphysics), in his case the recognition of some relevance to ontological and metaphysical questions came at the cost of a significant revision of their scope¹⁵. In a Quinean perspective, metaphysics, or ontology, is not a meaningless enterprise as long as it is devoted to a clarification of the implications of our theories, and not to a definition of “what there is” independently of them.

A somehow similar redetermination of what we should mean by “metaphysics” was introduced by Peter F. Strawson, whose 1959 *Individuals. An Essay in Descriptive Metaphysics* is recognized the merit of having reintroduced and rehabilitated metaphysics within ordinary-language-dominated Cambridge scholarship. Strawson claimed that any expression of knowledge requires the assumption that there are spatio-temporally defined bodies, or individuals, in order to have a framework of identifiable reference. One could frame this proposal as a transcendental claim for the “ontological commitment” of our knowledge: given the way our knowledge works, we need to assume that bodies exist. This transcendental framework is radicalized by Strawson’s claim that it is impossible to determine the correspondence of our knowledge, or “scheme”, to the world as it is independently of it.

¹⁴ The non-traditionally metaphysical or ontological implications of Quine’s perspective is also made visible in his further work. Between the 30s and the 60s Quine clarified its radically holistic epistemic position, claiming that theories are not produced through a 1:1 correspondence between their concepts and the single entities in the world, but are rather defined and evaluated through the consistency of theories as a whole with our experience as a whole (QUINE, Willard Van Orman. *Two Dogmas of Empiricism*. **The Philosophical Review**, vol. 60, 1951, pp. 20-43). This outlook was paired with Quine’s notorious claim for ontological relativity, according to which the only things that have to remain invariant in a theory are the number of objects to which it is ontologically committed and their relation within the theory, and not the nature of objects themselves (QUINE, Willard Van Orman. **Word and Object**. Cambridge: M.I.T. University Press, 1960).

¹⁵ The impression that Quine is “metaphysical” comes mostly from the debate in meta-metaphysics, which is mostly animated by Carnapians and Quineans.

This means that, once again, the “metaphysical” assumption that “bodies exists” does not have the ambition of being valid in an absolute, or “external” sense, but is only valid with reference to our scheme, and is a clarification of what we need to commit ourselves to ontologically, given our – inescapable - conceptual framework.

This was also the basis of Strawson’s distinction between revisionary and descriptive metaphysics. Whereas the former has the – vain and unwarranted – ambition of defining a conceptual framework that would actually correspond to the world “as it is”, the latter has the more modest, but attainable and worthy, objective of clarifying the conceptual framework that is already in use “from within”¹⁶.

Both Quine’s consideration of ontology and Strawson’s redescription of metaphysics, then, seem to answer to a similar programmatic indication as to what kind of metaphysics is worth pursuing, or as to what we should mean by metaphysics. Namely, both Quine and Strawson, although with different objectives, defended a notion of metaphysics in which ontological inquiry is relative to the framework in use, and is rather a matter of clarifying the implications of our conceptual schemes, more than of discovering how the world is independently of our knowledge¹⁷.

Just like Russell’s and Moore’s, also this programmatic indication had a long-lasting influence on Anglo-American philosophy’s meta-philosophical assumptions¹⁸.

Namely, this idea became central to the realism-antirealism debate, which was born out of the remains of the linguistic turn and revolved around the critique of the correspondence conception of truth and the notion of a conceptual scheme¹⁹. Since meaning is according to Quine not defined by a 1:1 correspondence between concepts and their referents, but is rather defined by internal relations between concepts, then our concepts make up a scheme which responds to its own, internal rules of objectivity. This posed the question as to

¹⁶ On the distinction between descriptive and revisionary metaphysics, as well as on this distinction’s link to the Quinean outlook, see VARZI, *Ontologia e Metafisica*, 2002.

¹⁷ In this sense, Strawson and Quine – the latter especially – are closer to Carnap than it may seem. On this, see SCHAFFER, *On What Grounds What*, 2009 and PRICE, *Carnap, Quine*, 1997.

¹⁸ A very clear formulation of this meta-philosophical commitment could be found in DUMMETT, Michael. **The Logical Basis of Metaphysics**. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993.

¹⁹ It is Davidson who explicitly made the connection between Quine’s holistic conception of experience and a conceptual scheme. See DAVIDSON, Donald. *On the Very Idea of a Conceptual Scheme*. **Proceedings and Addresses of the American Philosophical Association**, vol. 47, 1973 – 1974, pp. 5-20. See also GOODMAN, Nelson. **Ways of Worldmaking**. London, Hackett Publishing Co., 1978.; RORTY, Richard. **The Consequences of Pragmatism**. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1982, pp. 160-175. It should also be noted that the notion of a conceptual scheme was also connected to Benjamin L. Whorf’s principle of linguistic relativity.

how to verify that our experience of the world, as so informed by our conceptual scheme, corresponds to the world as it is independently of the scheme.

Many, Quine included, claimed the impossibility of stepping out of one's scheme in order to evaluate its correspondence to reality – also implying that any evaluation would circularly presuppose the scheme itself and its notion of truth or objectivity. This produced an array of different positions, going from Nelson Goodman's idea that our notion of reality is entirely constructed through language, to several forms of relativism claiming that our conceptual schemes vary over historical and cultural modifications, and that therefore several – and even incompatible – conceptions of truth are possible, and to Donald Davidson's claim that our conceptual scheme's internal conditions for objectivity are universal and cannot vary – and that this should give us confidence in the fact that our scheme indeed corresponds to reality in a “strong sense”.

In this context, one of the most influential positions had been Hilary Putnam's internal realism, which insists on the impossibility of “stepping out” of one's conceptual scheme in order to contemplate the world independently of it, and yet claims that within the scheme some conditions of objectivity can be found, that are fundamental and “non-relative” to historical modification or cultural peculiarities. Philosophy's task should then be the one of individuating such conditions.

For all their respective differences, all of these positions share the idea that our language or conceptual commitments inevitably shape our understanding of the world, and that therefore conceptual clarification, a theory of meaning or the study of language practices necessarily define the scope of metaphysics – as implied by Strawson's idea of a descriptive metaphysics.

This meta-philosophical indication is still followed today by authors which Zimmermann has aptly defined as “new-wave metaphysicians” – including in this label Putnam himself and John McDowell²⁰.

²⁰ ZIMMERMAN, Prologue, 2004, p. xvi. It is interesting that the realism/antirealism issue is considered within Anglo-American philosophy as a full-blown metaphysical problem, whereas to a more “traditional” or “continental” eye, it would look like rather pertaining to epistemology or to some speculation “preliminary” to metaphysics itself. As it will be shown below, the identification between the problem of realism and the scope of metaphysics is also found in the debate on Hegel: as a reaction to Robert Pippin's reading, a large part of the debate on Hegel's metaphysics focused on clarifying the relationship between thought and reality in Hegel. On this, see ILLETTERATI, Luca. Objectivity of Thought. *The Philosophy of Hegel Between Idealism, Anti-Idealism and Realism: An Introduction*. *Verifiche*, vol. 36, n. 1, 2007, pp. 13-31; ILLETTERATI, Luca. Il noto e il conosciuto. *Archivio di Filosofia*, vol. 85, n.1, 2017, pp. 15-31; ILLETTERATI, Luca. Der einzige Inhalt der Philosophie. Ontologie und Epistemologie in Hegels Begriff der Wirklichkeit. In: _____; Menegoni, F. (Orgs.). *Wirklichkeit. Beiträge zu einem Schlüsselbegriff der Hegelschen Philosophie*. Frankfurt am Main:

The first sense in which these authors are “new wave”, consists in the fact that their conception of philosophy’s (or more specifically metaphysics’) task does not coincide to the traditional (or, using Strawson’s category “revisionary”) one, and is a lot less ambitious in comparison: philosophy, or metaphysics, can only aim at a description of our conceptual and semantical structures. This is the only possible, non-self-refuting, definition of philosophy or metaphysics to this strand of thinkers.

In Zimmerman’s classification, though, these authors are “new wave” not only with reference to “traditional” (or “continental”) metaphysics, but also with reference to what he calls “analytic metaphysics”. This strand includes authors like Saul Kripke, David Chisholm, David Lewis and Peter Van Inwagen and responds to a much more ambitious notion of metaphysics, resurfaced through Alfred Tarski’s theory of truth and David Lewis’ work on modal logic, and based on the idea that truth is connected to the existence of objects or entities (and not to “internal” conceptual relations)²¹. Much closer to Russell’s and Moore’s realist ambitions, then, these authors think of metaphysics as the definition of what there *really* is.

According to Zimmerman, the contemporary debate in metaphysics could actually be divided between “new wave” and “analytic” factions²².

To these strands, he adds a third, which he calls “non-analytic” metaphysics and which includes all those authors in the Western tradition which would not identify as “analytic”. Based on a similar reconstruction as that presented here, he though concludes that the distinction between “analytic” and “non-analytic” metaphysicians is only fictitious, and based on the prejudice that “analytic” philosophy is anti-metaphysical. Thus, to a closer look “analytic” and “non-analytic” metaphysics share the same conception of metaphysics and the same objective.

Even though it has been widely shown how the consideration of analytic philosophy as “non-metaphysical” is nothing but a myth, the identification of “analytic” and “non-analytic” metaphysics might appear a little hasty. After all, all myths contain a kernel of truth.

Klostermann, 2018, pp. 11-42; HALBIG, Christoph *Pensieri Oggettivi. Verifiche*, vol. 36, n. 1, 2007, pp. 33-60; QUANTE, Michael, HALBIG, Christoph, SIEP, Ludwig, *Hegel’s Erbe*. Berlin: Suhrkamp Verlag, 2004.

²¹ See SIMONS, *Metaphysics in Analytic Philosophy* 2013, and VAN INWAGEN, Peter, SULLIVAN, Meghan *Metaphysics*. In: Zalta, E. N. (Org.). *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Spring 2020 Edition), 2020. Available at: <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2020/entries/metaphysics/>. Also the work of Gustav Bergmann and of the Australian School developing the works of Samuel Alexander, should be remembered in this context.

²² ZIMMERMAN, *Prologue*, 2004, p. xx-xxii.

As known, Russell's and Moore's realism was aimed against Francis H. Bradley's and McTaggart's British Idealism. This kind of idealism implied – at least in Russell's and Moore's eyes - the claim that the only one true object was the absolute and that analysis, that is, the separation of components from a whole, or of individuals from the absolute, would be impossible or amount to a crude misunderstanding of both the whole and the parts. This meant affirming the inconsistency of diversity: particulars are inconsistent, not real but only apparent, as parts of the only one existent object which is the absolute.

According to Russell and Moore, this had radically unacceptable epistemological consequences, because it denied fundamental intuitions grounding our everyday experience, such as the existence of particulars or the existence of time. For this reason, Russell, and especially Moore, based their realism on the claim for the possibility (and, actually, the necessity) of recognizing the consistency of diversity.

In other words, Russell's and Moore's realism was rooted in an irreducible pluralistic commitment to the reality of particulars and individuals, based in its turn on strong reliance on common sense for its defence²³.

Russell and Moore's commonsensical pluralism claimed then the reality of basic multiple elements of reality, which could be identified non-relationally and which could not and should not, for any reason, be grounded or essentially connected to any other element of reality, let alone a whole, a substrate, or a one absolute ground.

Said connection would immediately imply the relinquishing of common sense's mainland, and the entrance in the deadly waters of monistic non-sense, ultimately leading to a denial of the reality and consistency of all things in the world other than the one and only absolute.

To a closer look, then, Russell and Moore's common-sensical realism entailed a metaphysical indication which was a little more specific than the simple identification of metaphysics with the aim of describing how reality *really* is, independently of a conceptual scheme. It required the refusal of any attempt at understanding the fundamental structure of reality in terms of essential (grounding) relations (as this would immediately coincide with the denial of the consistency of particulars), and the consideration of the pluralistic belief in

²³ This is especially true of Moore. See RUSSELL, Bertrand. **The Analysis of Matter**. 2nd edition. New York: Allen & Unwin, 1954 p. 325: "I share the common-sense belief that there are many separate things: I do not regard the apparent multiplicity of the world as consisting merely in phases and unreal divisions of a single indivisible Reality".

the existence of “many things” as an unchallenged assumption, which didn’t require proper philosophical consideration, but could simply be taken up from common sense.

This meta-philosophical perspective actually leaves out a significant part of what in the Western philosophical tradition has been defined metaphysics; both because several figures widely recognized as metaphysicians, such as Spinoza, or Plotinus, were “monists” determined to connect particulars to a one unitary and fundamental absolute, and because also those authors who defended pluralism, such as Leibniz, did not merely assume it through reference to common sense, but actually defended it as if the question regarding the structure of reality was a philosophically weighty issue²⁴.

Recapitulating, there seems to be three notions of metaphysics:

1) **New wave metaphysics** which is limited to the understanding and clarification of the conceptual (or semantic) structures through which we make sense of the world, provided that it would be impossible to conceive of a world independently of these very same structures, and that therefore these structures describe the only possible reality of which we can ever conceive.

2) **Analytic metaphysics**, which attempts at defining what exist in the world independently of our conceptual schemes. This strand of metaphysics is defined by a commitment to realism and pluralism, which is usually defended through common-sense and almost taken as an unchallenged assumption, whose only alternative is the kind of idealistic monism associated with Bradley. It therefore tends to shy away from issues regarding grounding relations amongst objects and to promote what Jonathan Schaffer defined a “flat ontology”²⁵.

3) **Non-analytic metaphysics**, which shares with analytic metaphysics the conviction that its scope is not defined by our conceptual structures. What this notion of metaphysics does not share with analytic metaphysics, though, is the fact that it does not assume pluralism at the outset, that it does not shy away from foundational questions, and that it does not escape the question concerning the overall structure of reality through mere reference to common sense.

²⁴ On this, see SCHAFFER, *On What Grounds What*, 2009; SCHAFFER, Jonathan, *The Internal Relatedness of All Things*. *Mind*, vol. 119 n. 474, 2010, pp. 341-376). It should also be noted that the distinction between “analytical” and “non-analytical” metaphysics drawn here does allow for a few exceptions: Schaffer himself, for instance, or Varzi, who suggests understanding the difference between metaphysics and ontology as, respectively, the study of the fundamental structures of reality and the study of what there is (VARZI, *Ontologia e Metafisica*, 2002).

²⁵ SCHAFFER, *On What Grounds What*, 2009, p. 364-5.

As remarked, this latter position seems to be best represented by authors of the tradition, such as Plotinus, Spinoza, or Leibniz. This raises the question as to whether this strand of metaphysics should legitimately be included within the strands animating the contemporary metaphysical scene. Both “new wave” and “analytic” metaphysicians, making up the mainstream of today's metaphysics, would answer in the negative, claiming that monism has been aptly shown by Russell and Moore to be a dead end, insofar as it would immediately imply the contradictory claim for the inconsistency of individuals.

Recently, though, authors like Kit Fine, Theodore Sider, and especially Jonathan Schaffer challenged the metaphysical mainstream and advocated for a concept of metaphysics similar to the “non-analytical” one, including grounding issues, questions concerning the overall structure of reality, and even a monistic perspective²⁶. The contemporary relevance and viability of this kind of metaphysics is then yet an open question.

3. Metaphysics in the debate on Hegel's Metaphysics

Russell had no doubt as to where to place Hegel's metaphysics within the above-sketched meta-philosophical classification: alongside with Bradley, Hegel should be considered a proponent of that very kind of idealistic monism which constituted the most out-dated and absurd strand of the overall out-dated kind of metaphysics above labelled as “non-analytic metaphysics”.

This consideration was shared by the mainstream of Anglo-American philosophy up until 1972, when Klaus Hartmann suggested that Hegel's metaphysics did not entail the kind of metaphysics associated with Bradley, and actually did not entail any kind of traditional metaphysics at all²⁷.

According to Hartmann, Hegel's metaphysics was a category theory, committed to the clarification of the commitment of our everyday conceptual structures, without any ambition to formulate “external” claims of existence”. So interpreted, Hegel seemed to be perfectly in line with the anti-metaphysical requirements of the “middle period” of analytic philosophy. Even though Hartmann's reading did not have much fortune, it had a huge impact insofar as it

²⁶ See SCHAFFER, *On What Grounds What*, 2009; SCHAFFER, *The Internal Relatedness*, 2010; SIDER, Theodore *Writing the Book of the World*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2010; CORREIA, Fabrice, SCHNEIDER, Benjamin (Orgs.). *Metaphysical Grounding: Understanding the Structure of Reality*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016.

²⁷ HARTMANN, Klaus, *Hegel: A Non-Metaphysical View*. In: MacIntyre, A. (Org.). *Hegel. A Collection of Critical Essays*. Anchor Books: New York, 1972, pp. 101-124.

posed the question as to whether Hegel's metaphysics should be considered contemporary relevant after all. Around this question arose what was later called the debate between "traditional metaphysical", "revised-metaphysical" and "post-Kantians" interpretations of Hegel²⁸.

The "traditional metaphysical" interpretation of Hegel has among its most prominent proponents Charles Taylor, Frederik Beiser, and Rolf-Peter Horstmann²⁹.

In his 1975 book *Hegel*, Taylor presented an in-depth interpretation of Hegel which confirmed Russell's assumption: Hegel's metaphysics is here considered as a monism, in which an all-encompassing substance is considered to be the one and only truly existent "object". On this reading, the peculiarity of Hegel's monism and what makes it distinctively idealistic is that the all-encompassing substance is Geist, a self-creating entity, responding not to spinozistic necessity, but to some form of Kantian freedom³⁰.

Horstmann tried to update this interpretation, eliminating its religious undertones and assigning a much bigger role to the dimension of (individual) self-consciousness in the constitution of what Hegel meant by *Geist*. Nevertheless, he still sees Hegel as a monist and insists that the main scope of his metaphysics was to grasp the "absolute", meant as a one fundamental entity or structure, providing the grounding reason for all there is³¹.

According to the "traditional metaphysical" interpretation, then, Hegel not only is to be considered a proponent of "non-analytic metaphysics" but also, and namely because of that, not of contemporary relevance³².

²⁸ See REDDING, Paul. Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel. In: Zalta, E. N. (Org). **The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy** (Winter 2020 Edition). 2020b. Available at: <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2020/entries/hegel/>. A similar attempt at making Hegel palatable to contemporary philosophy (in this case, to ordinary language philosophy) was made by J. N. Findlay (FINDLAY, John Niemeyer. **Hegel: A Re-Examination**. New York: Allen & Unwin, 1958).

²⁹ See REDDING, Georg Wilhelm, 2020b; KREINES, James. Hegel's Metaphysics: Changing the Debate. **Philosophy Compass**, vol. 1 n. 5, 2006, pp. 466-480.

³⁰ This kind of interpretation of Hegel usually also came with strongly theological undertones, which surely did not help to make Hegel palatable to rigorously laic and "enlightened" analytic philosophers which followed in the steps of Russell. This kind of reading of Hegel goes way back and can for instance be found in the works of Royce and of the so-called "St. Louis Hegelians".

³¹ See HORSTMANN, Rolf-Peter. What is Hegel's Legacy and What Should We Do With It. **European Journal of Philosophy**, vol. 7, n. 2, 1999, pp. 257-287: "The leading intention in Hegel's philosophical thought is to demonstrate that the whole of reality in all its different manifestations (...) must be understood as the result of a process which consists in the self-explicating activity of a single entity" (p. 278); "All there is is reason, or, there is nothing but reason – this is the monistic credo Hegel wants to convince us of" (p. 279).

³² This is spelled out very clearly in the renown article "What is Hegel's Legacy and What Should We Do With It", by Horstmann: "One need not be a prophet in order to see that few contemporary philosophers are likely to find a philosophical programme based on Hegel's heritage to be very attractive (...). The reason (...) seems to be that our understanding of what one should do in philosophy has changed" HORSTMANN, What is Hegel's Legacy, 1999, p. 281.

The “Post-Kantian” interpretation has perhaps been the most publicity-catching one on both sides of the ocean: whereas within Anglo-American scholarship this reading of Hegel was so surprising, because it challenged the widespread assumption that Hegel was an out-dated and theologically committed Spinozist, within “continentals” it was shocking because it challenged the assumption that contemporary English-speaking philosophy and a traditional thinker such as Hegel had nothing in common.

As known, this reading has among its most prominent proponents Robert Pippin, Terry Pinkard, Sally Sedgwick and Rocío Zambrana. The seminal text for the definition of this interpretative strand was Pippin’s *Hegel’s Idealism*³³.

There, Pippin presented a reading of Hegel’s metaphysics as “conceptual scheme idealism”, emphasizing Hegel’s indebtedness to Kant and explicitly putting his philosophy in relation to Hilary Putnam’s internal realism³⁴.

According to Pippin, Hegel’s idealism consists of two combined elements³⁵.

The first, presented in the first four chapters of the *Phenomenology*, consists in the *reductio ad absurdum* of the very idea of a world independent from thought’s conceptual structures³⁶. According to Pippin, this is where Hegel’s advancement in comparison to Kant is made, and what makes Hegel’s idealism “absolute” compared to Kant’s “finite” one. By demonstrating that a world “outside” and “independent” of thought is actually inconceivable, Hegel solved what is according to Pippin the central problem, which Kant left unsolved in the Deduction. Namely, Hegel eliminated the reference of “pure concepts” to “external” intuitions, which made their objectivity in Kant only “relative” or “limited”³⁷. In other words,

³³ PIPPIN, Robert. **Hegel’s idealism. The Satisfaction of Self-Consciousness**. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1989.

³⁴ PIPPIN, **Hegel’s Idealism**, 1989, p. 279, n. 15 and pp. 40, 130, 138. It should be noted that the term “metaphysics” was not very much used by Pippin in its first works (there’s for instance very little occurrences of the term in *Hegel’s Idealism*, where “metaphysics” is mostly used with negative connotation and with the meaning it has for the “traditional metaphysical” interpretation). This fact gave way to the first classification of Pippin’s interpretation as also “non-metaphysical”, alongside with Hartmann’s. It is namely in clarifying how this labelling was misleading that Pippin made clear that his interpretation was a reading of Hegel’s metaphysics as a specific kind of metaphysics – but a metaphysics nevertheless, and the only one possible after Kant’s transcendental turn. See PIPPIN, Robert. *Finite and Infinite Idealism. The Transcendental and the Metaphysical Hegel*. In: Gardner, S.; Grist, M. (Orgs.). **The Transcendental Turn**. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015, pp. 159 - 172.

³⁵ This “double strategy” mirrors Hilary Putnam’s strategy for proposing his internal realism: on the one hand, we have a *reductio* of the idea of an external world entirely different and detached from our own mind (whose most famous version is presented through the “Brain-in-a-Vat” argument; PUTNAM, Hilary. **Reason, Truth and History**. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981, pp. 1-21; on the other, the idea that then a study of fundamental constraints within our conceptual scheme can still provide us with a sense of objectivity strong enough to contrast relativism.

³⁶ PIPPIN, **Hegel’s Idealism**, 1989, pp. 93-94.

³⁷ PIPPIN, **Hegel’s Idealism**, 1989, pp.16-41; 2015.

the *reductio ad absurdum* of the very idea of a world independent from thought serves as a demonstration that the only reality, or objectivity we can ever conceive of is one always-already shaped by our conceptual structures, and that such objectivity should not be considered as “limited” in comparison to some ideally “pure” and “a-conceptual” reality, but should rather be deemed as all there is to objectivity³⁸.

The second element of Hegel’s metaphysics is according to Pippin presented in the *Logic* and consists in a study of those conceptual structures which, analogously to Kant’s pure concepts, “make up” and “structure” our conceptual schemes, serving as invariant and fundamental “conditions” for objectivity³⁹.

Recently, due at least partially to the fact that “metaphysics” has become more and more an accepted and nuanced term within the Anglo-American discourse, Pippin has more openly defined his conception of Hegel’s idealism as a conception of Hegel’s metaphysics⁴⁰. What Pippin means, is that for Hegel metaphysics consists of the study and clarification of the conceptual structures which inform our understanding of reality, analogously to Kant’s “pure concepts” – and this is the reason why Hegel’s metaphysics has the form of a logic, as in a radicalization and extension of Kant’s transcendental logic⁴¹.

³⁸ PIPPIN, *Finite and Infinite Idealism*, 2015.

³⁹ The Subjective Logic is for Pippin a presentation of these concepts, whereas the Objective Logic serves both as a renewed reduction of concepts of objectivity which imply some “external”, mind-independent referent, and a trial-and-error evaluation of sufficient enough concepts to define objectivity, or determination. It should also be noted that the idea that there are “fundamental”, invariable conceptual components which serve as “conditions of objectivity” in our conceptual schemes is a point on which Post-Kantian readings, which follow in the steps of Pippin, actually vary. Other post-Kantian authors, as for instance Rocío Zambrana, allow much more historical and cultural mobility also to these “fundamentally” structuring concepts in our conceptual scheme. See ZAMBRANA, Rocío, Pippin’s Hegel. Hegel’s Practical Philosophy: Rational Agency as Ethical Life. Review Essay. *Graduate Faculty Journal*, vol. 31, n. 2, 2008, pp. 423-441; ZAMBRANA, Rocío, *Hegel’s Theory of Intelligibility*. Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2015.; PINKARD, Terry. *The Logic of Hegel’s Logic. Journal of the History of Philosophy*, vol. 17, n. 4, 1979, pp. 417-435.

⁴⁰ I believe the wide-spread claim that Pippin’s most recent book, *Hegel’s Realm of Shadows*, presents a radical rethinking of his conceptual scheme idealism interpretation (as seen for instance in BAUMANN, Charlotte, Hegel’s realm of shadows: logic as metaphysics in the science of logic: by Robert Pippin, Chicago, IL, University of Chicago Press, 2019, pp. 339, £34.00, ISBN 978-0-226588704, *British Journal for the History of Philosophy* vol. 27, n.6, 2019, pp.1256-1260) is actually a misconception that feeds off of a misunderstanding of *Hegel’s Idealism* as a “non-metaphysical” book. What Pippin is actually doing in *Hegels’ Realm of Shadows*, as pointed out in several reviews of the volume and by himself (PIPPIN, *Hegel’s real of Shadows*, 2018, p. 255, n. 4), is clarifying his conceptual scheme idealism, especially defending it from the accusation of being too “transcendental”, and therefore of claiming some reality and limitedness to our all-conceptual notion of reality and objectivity. See KREINES, *Systematicity and Philosophical Interpretation*, 2020; NG, *Science of Logic as Critique of Judgment? Reconsidering Pippin’s Hegel 2019*; WOLF, William Clark, Pippin Robert. *Hegel’s Realm of Shadows: Logic as Metaphysics in the Science of Logic. The Review of Metaphysics*, vol. 73, n. 1, 2019, pp. 146-148. For a compelling discussion of the unavoidable ontological implications of “post-Kantian” readings of Hegel, see LEBANIDZE, Giorgi *Hegel’s Transcendental Ontology*, Berlin: DeGruyter, 2018.

⁴¹ PIPPIN, *Finite and Infinite Idealism*, 2015, p.232: “This is Hegel’s chief metaphysical point, even though it is not a point in substantial metaphysics (...). The forms of judgement, the forms of thought, are the forms of

Bearing in mind the above-sketched classification of the different notions of metaphysics present in the contemporary scene, one can see how in Pippin's eyes Hegel should be counted amongst the "new wave" metaphysicians and should therefore, *pace* Russell and "traditional metaphysical interpreters", be considered a contemporary relevant author.

In the early 2000s, a group of interpreters, later defined as "revised metaphysical" interpreters, criticized Pippin's "post-Kantian" transcendental interpretation, while still distancing their reading of Hegel's metaphysics from the "traditional metaphysical" one and still claiming that Hegel's metaphysics retained contemporary appeal.

Differently from the post-Kantian, the "revised metaphysical" label gathers a much broader range of interpretations, very different from each other – having amongst its main proponents James Kreines, Robert Stern, and Stephen Houlgate⁴².

What these readings share is the claim that Hegel's metaphysics is much more ambitious than Pippin would have it, and namely that it aspires to describe how the world *really* is. Thus, for these authors the conceptual structures expounded in the logic are ontological structures not in the "descriptive", "downsized" sense Pippin means: they are not internal, conceptual constraints that shape any possible understanding or experience of the world, but are both structures of our thought *and* structures of the world as it is, independently of our understanding of it⁴³.

Even though this reading of Hegel's metaphysics is much more "traditional" than the one proposed by the Post-Kantians, it is called "*revised* metaphysical" for a reason: contrary to the "traditional metaphysical" interpreters, the revised metaphysical account recognizes Hegel's contemporary appeal, and, just like the post-Kantian, does so through the recognition of Hegel's indebtedness to Kant.

The Hegel-Kant connection is played differently than in Pippin, though, and namely in two ways: on the one hand, these authors claim that Hegel would have abolished the

things"; PIPPIN, Robert. Hegel on Logic as Metaphysics. In: Moyar, D. (Org.). **The Oxford Companion to Hegel**. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017, pp. 199-218. 2017, p. 209: "This - (...) the fact that we cannot make sense of sense making without it being the case that ways of making sense have actually made sense of things as they are – is (...) what [Hegel, *nda*] means by saying that logic is metaphysics".

⁴² See REDDING, Georg Wilhelm, 2020b. It should be noted that, although a very sharp critic of Pippin, Houlgate is less invested than, for instance, Kreines and Stern in accounting for the "contemporary appeal" of Hegel's metaphysics.

⁴³ This is made very clear by Houlgate, who speaks of the *Logic* as an "onto-logic", see HOULGATE, Stephen. **The Opening of Hegel's Logic: From Being to Infinity**. West Lafayette: Purdue University Press, 2006, pp. 123.

distinction between appearances and things in themselves⁴⁴, and, on the other, these authors claim that Hegel's metaphysics complies with Kant's critique because it does not entail the part of traditional metaphysics which was actually Kant's target, that is, what Stern identifies with *metaphysica specialis*⁴⁵.

In the distinction of the field of metaphysics operated by the German scholastic metaphysics in XVIIIth century, *metaphysica specialis* was devoted to the study of psychology, cosmology and rational theology, that is, to the study of the soul, the world and God, meant as transcendent and fundamental objects, which functioned as grounds of all other properties or entities in their field. *Metaphysica generalis*, or ontology, on the other hand, was devoted to the study of *being qua being*.

As known, the main target of Kant's Transcendental Dialectic (where, as noted by Stern and Kreines against Pippin, Kant's *true* critique of metaphysics should be found) was *metaphysica specialis*. In the Dialectic, Kant shows how the presupposition of transcendent, "ultimate" objects like those studied by *metaphysica specialis* leads to irresolvable dilemmas and, therefore, to contradictory and self-refuting results. According to Kant, this signals an epistemic limit: reason cannot grasp the unconditioned, that is, it cannot have theoretical knowledge of a complete, underlying ground which could account for everything there is while being independent from anything else. Thus, the only value which can be recognized to

⁴⁴ See STERN, Robert. **Hegelian Metaphysics**. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009, p. 19). This is a central, and yet tricky point, since – as has been noted above – also according to Pippin's post-Kantian reading *Hegel's Science of Logic* could be considered a metaphysics insofar as the distinction between the plane of things and themselves and that appearances, meant as a supposedly "external" and "mind-independent" reality and a conceptually informed one, is abolished through the demonstration of the self-refuting character of the notion of an "external world" itself. This could lead to wonder whether the distinction between these two types of "metaphysical" readings is a substantial one. The subtle, yet substantial distinction lies in *how* the lifting of the distinction between appearances and things-in-themselves is meant: in Pippin the fact that an "external" plane where things in themselves would be is a self-refuting notion does not lead to lessening of the "discursive" (not to say transcendental) character of the structures which are the object of metaphysics. To the contrary, in Houlgate and Stern the elimination of the plane of things in themselves is meant to reveal the non-discursive, in the sense of non-transcendental and non-subjective, character of the notion of thought at the base of the *Logic*. See HOULGATE, **The Opening**, 2006, p.125; HOULGATE, Stephen. Thought and Being in Hegel's Logic. Reflections on Hegel, Kant and Pippin. In: Illetterati, L., Menegoni, F. (Orgs.). **Wirklichkeit. Beiträge zu einem Schlüsselbegriff der Hegelschen Philosophie**. Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann, 2018, pp. 101-18; PIPPIN, Finite and Infinite Idealism, 2015.

⁴⁵ KREINES, James, Metaphysics Without Pre-Critical Monism, **Hegel Bulletin**, vol. 57, 2008, p. 50: "Hegel entirely reject all forms of metaphysical rationalism, including rationalist monism. He holds that there is no single ground providing a complete reason for everything real, not even in the whole of everything. That is to say that non-metaphysical interpretations are correct about something important: Hegel rejects a form of metaphysics that Kant was especially concerned to criticise". Compare with Stern, **Hegelian Metaphysics**, 2009, pp. 31-32. While Kreines held up until 2015 that Hegel was not a rational or ontological monist, and that he was only an "epistemological monist", it should be noted that he has recently revised his position to make it include a stronger form of monism, albeit still non-traditional and non-rationalist. See KREINES, James, Aristotelian Priority, Metaphysical Definitions of God and Hegel on Pure Thought as Absolute, **Hegel Bulletin**, vol. 41, n. 1, 2020, pp. 19-39.

the idea of the unconditioned is regulative: it helps reason to go about in its inquiries, but cannot be made an object of reason itself. Renownedly, this is the basis for Kant's suggestion of a downsizing of the aim of knowledge, which should only aspire to grasp objects in the realm of the conditioned and within the epistemic limits defined by the Transcendental Analytic.

Revised metaphysical interpreters claim that Hegel rejects the reduction of the scope of knowledge on the basis of a supposedly epistemic limit separating appearances from things in themselves. In this sense, Hegel's ambitions are much more metaphysical than Kant's. Yet, they suggest that Hegel would take the outcome of the Dialectic to imply the need to limit the ambitions of metaphysics to the sole scope of *metaphysica generalis*. By this they mean that metaphysics is for Hegel devoted to the study of fundamental ontological structures animating reality. These structures do not only amount to individual entities, as in the more restricted, contemporary definition of ontology as an inquiry into "what there is"⁴⁶, but also include the definition, for instance, of causality and other relations among entities, which make up the structure of reality⁴⁷. What is left out is the attempt at grasping the unconditioned, which Stern sums up in the question "why is there anything at all, and not nothing?"⁴⁸. In other words, what differentiates Hegel's metaphysical account from more traditional metaphysics, is the fact that Hegel would not attempt at identifying and describing a one, fundamental entity grounding, or accounting for, the whole of reality. This one, fundamental entity is what has been traditionally identified with the absolute, as a transcendent object which would act as the foundation of all there is in the world, by lying "outside", or "beyond" it. Since this task has been demonstrated to be self-refuting by Kant, it would make any metaphysics that tries to pursue it after it outdated. The refusal to engage in this specific task is signaled, according to Stern, by the fact that Hegel presents an "immanent" understanding of the absolute, which makes it co-extensive to the material, finite world. In this sense, Hegel's absolute is nothing more than the sum of the objects of the *metaphysica generalis*, and cannot be thematized as a one, individual object or entity – since this would make it immediately transcendent⁴⁹.

⁴⁶ SCHAFFER, On What Grounds What, 2009; VARZI, Ontologia e Metafisica, 2002.

⁴⁷ "By 'metaphysics' I mean any claim or theory concerning reality itself, and especially any claim or theory about a general nature of reality, general features or structure of reality, or about relations of dependence and independence among real things", KREINES, James, Metaphysics Without Pre-Critical Monism, p. 48-9.

⁴⁸ STERN, *Hegelian Metaphysics*, 2009, p. 33.

⁴⁹ Whereas for Stern what makes the unconditioned problematic is its conception as transcendent – i.e. as some substance or substrate laying "beyond" the world –, Kreines is more radical and also includes immanent conceptions of the absolute within the kind of metaphysics that Hegel would reject: "Metaphysical rationalism need not have anything to do with anything otherworldly (...). One could hold that everything real is part of just

Therefore, the question as to “why is there anything at all, and not nothing?”, i.e. the question concerning a one principle grounding the whole of reality, cannot be answered: the problem of whether and how contingency, or finitude has a unitary ground or not, is assumed, via the acceptance of Kant’s critique, to be nonsensical or unsolvable.

Bearing in mind the above-sketched reconstruction of the different contemporary meanings of metaphysics, one can notice a similarity of these reading’s interpretation of Hegel’s metaphysics with what has been called “analytic metaphysics”. Just as “analytic metaphysics”, Hegel’s metaphysics has in this reading the ambition of studying what there *really* is, but shies away from the question concerning the structure of reality as a whole, when this is meant as what accounts for its being what it is, or as what grounds it in its totality⁵⁰. Also here, the motive behind this dismissal is a fear of monism, which is seen (through a more or less conscious assumption of Russell’s and Moore’s critique) as immediately implying the negation of the consistence of particulars⁵¹. Contrary to that, the upshot of a metaphysics which refuses to engage in the study of the “single ground providing a complete reason for everything real”, is that it would preserve the “contingency” of being, i.e. it would preserve the consistency of particularity within it:

Nature contains real contingency, in the sense that it contains things that are not necessitated by any underlying ground or reason. For example, take the lower-level natural kinds: no underlying ground or reason necessitates the actual network of kinds; it is merely contingent⁵².

On Hegel’s view, to cognize reality in absolute terms, is just to see that while concepts like ‘cause’, or ‘ground’, or ‘essence’, and so on make sense when applied to matters within it, they do not make sense when applied to it as a totality—so that in this way, the question of why there is being and not nothing drops away, without requiring us to give ‘what is’ the status of a necessary existent⁵³.

such a series, so that everything real has an unconditioned ground in the whole or totality of reality” (KREINES, James, *Metaphysics Without Pre-Critical Monism*, p. 50). Both in Stern and in Kreines, though, the absolute cannot be thematized as an object –either because it is immanent in the world, or because it is just denied to be there in the first place.

⁵⁰ It is in this sense not surprising that the revised metaphysical reading of Hegel supports its claim for the relevance of Hegel’s metaphysics by putting it explicitly in dialogue with contemporary authors such as Edward J. Lowe and Michel J. Loux, in the case of Stern, or as David Armstrong and Simon Blackburn in the case of Kreines.

⁵¹ The connection between this reading of Hegel’s metaphysics and the refusal of monism is very explicit in Kreines – where the contemporary appeal of Hegel’s account is openly linked to its non-monistic character: “Hegel entirely rejects all forms of metaphysical rationalism, including rationalist monism. He holds that there is no single ground providing a complete reason for everything real, not even in the whole of everything” (KREINES, James, *Metaphysics Without Pre-Critical Monism*, p. 50).

⁵² KREINES, James, *Metaphysics Without Pre-Critical Monism*, p. 60.

⁵³ STERN, *Hegelian Metaphysics*, 2009, p. 34.

To recapitulate, to a closer inspection the debate on the nature of Hegel's metaphysics clearly reflects the meta-philosophical commitments, which we have seen present in the contemporary scene: the post-Kantian reading attributes to Hegel a very similar conception of metaphysics as the one that has above been defined as "new wave", whereas the revised metaphysical interpretation defines Hegel's project "metaphysical" with reference to the notion of metaphysics above defined as "analytic metaphysics".

In both cases, there is a downsizing of metaphysics's aims – either in the direction of a "descriptive", transcendental metaphysics of experience, or in the direction a conception of metaphysics, which does not engage with the question concerning the overall foundation of reality. It is precisely with reference to this downsizing, doesn't ever matter in which of these two directions, that both interpretations claim the contemporary relevance of Hegel's metaphysics.

As sketched above, any conception of metaphysics entailing the thematization of an absolute or ultimate ground of all reality is immediately reconnected to the kind of monism, which Russell and Moore attributed to British Hegelianism, and criticized as implying the nonsensical denial of the consistence of particulars. Precisely, this identification between an engagement with the question on the ultimate foundation of reality and a kind of self-refuting metaphysics is found in the "traditional metaphysical" interpretation of Hegel, where the reading of Hegel as a monist is immediately tied with the claim for its out-datedness.

In what follows, I will provide a few insights into what Hegel meant by metaphysics and consider whether his own conception of the task of metaphysics corresponds to any of the three definitions of metaphysics ("new wave", "analytic", "non-analytical") that I have presented here.

4. Metaphysics in Hegel

I will first address the question as to whether Hegel's metaphysics could be considered "new wave", as the post-Kantian reading seems to suggest.

As reconstructed, the post-Kantian reading pivots on Hegel's identification of logic and metaphysics⁵⁴. This identification found both in the *Encyclopaedia Logic* and in the

⁵⁴ PIPPIN, *Finite and Infinite Idealism*, 2015; PIPPIN, *Hegel on Logic as Metaphysics*, 2017; PIPPIN, *Hegel's Realm of Shadows*, 2018.

Introduction to the *Science of logic*⁵⁵, is read in antirealist, or internalist, terms. That is, as standing on a *reductio* of the very idea of a non-conceptual reality and on a consequent identification of our conceptual structures with ontological structures – given that no alternative to our conceptually-informed understanding of reality can, within the bounds of this very conceptually-informed understanding, be conceived of. In this reading, then, the identification of thought and being is indirect, in the sense that the study of being’s structure independently of thought’s structure is not a possibility, and therefore there is no way of studying being’s structure so to say “for itself”, and somehow “verify” that it matches to thought’s.

Further, on this reading there is no modification of what is meant by subjectivity, or by thought: the concept is the same as the “Kantian” one, and refers to an ensemble of concepts and beliefs organized through fundamental conceptual constraints that reflect the way we, conceptually-equipped beings, make sense of experience. Our conceptual framework only becomes “absolute” in virtue of the impossibility of conceiving of an alternative, and therefore of doubting our own scheme.

In this sense, the transcendental limit gets thrown out of the door but comes back again from the window. True, there is no possibility of thinking of some thing or reality “in itself” limiting *our* experience from outside, but still our understanding of the world remains marked by some sort of internal limit: our understanding of reality remains dependent on our “nature” as such-and-such conceptually equipped beings.

Further, on this reading our scheme still needs to apply to “something”, as a net or a “stamp” giving it conceptual form. Thus, the hypothesis of a non-conceptual world “in itself” still stands, and the possibility that it is “different” from the way we conceive of it also remains open, as it has not been directly refuted, but only demonstrated as “unverifiable”.

I think that Pippin’s reading should be put to the test of a closer look to the context in which Hegel makes the identification of logic and metaphysics.

If we look at the paragraph in the *Encyclopedia Logic Vorbegriff*, where Hegel claims that:

Logic thus coincides with *metaphysics*, i.e. the science of *things* captured in *thoughts* that have counted as expressing *the essentialities of things*⁵⁶.

⁵⁵ ENZ, §24; SL, p. 42.

⁵⁶ ENZ §24.

We see that in the very same paragraph and in the following one he is presenting a very peculiar conception of thought, which he calls “objective thought”, claiming that it is only insofar as it is taken to be studying thought as “objective thought”, that logic should be considered a metaphysics.

“Objective thought” is indeed connected to our more “ordinary” conception of thought and subjectivity, but seems to imply something more. In paragraphs §§20-23, in fact, Hegel specifies that what objective thought has in common with our most ordinary understanding of thought is its ability of connecting the thought of something specific, or individual – i.e. a specific sensation, or intuition - to what Hegel calls “the universal”. This “universal” is here associated to the peculiar ability of thought to refer only to itself, and abstract from any “external” determination: thought “translates” all of its objects into concepts, and through that it makes them, so to say, part of itself.

Its *product*, namely the determinacy or form of thought, is the *universal*, the abstract in general. *Thinking* as an *activity* is thus the *active* universal and, more precisely, the universal that acts upon *itself* in so far as its accomplishment, i.e. what it produces, is the universal⁵⁷.

Therefore, in referring to anything “external”, thought actually always ends up referring to itself, because all of its objects are-always-already thoughts. As this activity of connecting any determination to its own self-referring, thought is compared to the experience of the “I”: just like the “I”, thought translates everything in its own terms, so to say, and therefore has no other “external” reference than itself⁵⁸. Further, by abstracting from any external reference for defining its truth or objectivity, thought – in this very specific consideration of it⁵⁹ - not only is always referred to itself in all of its determinations, but it also becomes something extremely particular. That is, in its being entirely isolated from everything that is not itself, it immediately excludes all of its objects, producing then *within itself* the opposition between itself and its objects. This operation is what produces the

⁵⁷ ENZ § 20.

⁵⁸ ENZ § 20: “Represented as a *subject*, thinking is a *thinking being*, and the simple expression for a concretely existing [*existierenden*] subject that thinks is *I*”.

⁵⁹ We are here considering thought in its most fundamental gesture, or activity, present in all more “ordinary” forms of thought, but somehow “hidden” or not thematized. The ordinary experience of thought is for Hegel that of representation, in which thought’s being referred to itself is not “thematized” or “recognized”, so that thought’s content appears defined through reference to external objects. For a discussion of Hegel’s different conceptions of thought, see SORESI, Sergio, **Il soggetto del pensiero. Modi e articolazione della nozione di pensiero in Hegel**. Trento: Verifiche, 2009.

determination of thought, what gives it “content”, and what guarantees that thought “adheres” to its objects.

Freedom is immediately entailed by thinking because thinking is the activity of the universal, a relating of itself to itself that is accordingly abstract, a subjectively non-determinate being-with-itself [*Beisichsein*] that at the same time, as far as its *content* is concerned, is only in the *basic matter* and its determinations⁶⁰.

So far, this can seem like a really fitting argument for Pippin’s reading: “objective thought” produces its own determinations, and has only itself, and the internal relationships between its determinations, as the referent for its objectivity. This could be read as the fact that, according to Hegel, the conceptual structure of human thought cannot be escaped, and should thus be considered as the best definition of objectivity, or reality, we can get.

Yet, this description of objective thought as the object of the *Logic* is also connected to claims like:

In thinking things over their true nature emerges⁶¹.

Insofar as tries to come up with a concept of things, this concept (...) cannot be made up of determinations and which are alien and external to those things (...). The fact that there is rhyme and reason [*Verstand, Vernunft*] to the world conveys exactly what is contained in the expression 'objective thought'. To be sure, the latter expression is awkward because thought is habitually used for something belonging to the mind [*Geist*] (...) and what is objective is for the most part attributed to what is not mental⁶².

These passages seem to suggest something a little more radical than the mere fact that through a study of our conceptual structures the *Logic* presents the only way in which objectivity can be experienced by “us” conceptually equipped beings. To put it in the terms used by Hegel in the last quoted passage: it is not just that the “objective” should be revealed as belonging to *Geist*, in the sense that it would be inconceivable independently of our “*geistige*”, or conceptual, structures, but also that what belongs to “*Geist*” should be revealed as “objective”. That is, our conceptual structures should be revealed to be not just “ours”, but also present in the world, proper of being somehow “previously” or “independently” of the

⁶⁰ ENZ §23.

⁶¹ ENZ §23.

⁶² ENZ §24.

fact that there are conceptually equipped beings “using” these structures and applying them to the world⁶³.

These remarks seem to imply that the conception of thought at the basis of the *Logic* is different from the “ordinary”, subjective one, which still seems to be assumed by Pippin⁶⁴.

If then conceiving of the coincidence of thought and being from the side of thought - taken as “what belongs to *Geist*” - being “objective” alone is misleading, the key to grasping the coincidence of thought and being in Hegel should be found in understanding how exactly it would be possible to conceive of the objective as part of “what belongs to *Geist*”.

Some clarification in this direction comes from the passage from the Objective into the Subjective Logic, and namely from the section “On the Concept in General”.

Here Hegel presents the Concept, as the first category of the Subjective Logic, with very similar terms as those used for “objective thought”: the Concept is a structure which only refers to itself and yet, in its self-referring, also produces its own determinations, producing an opposition between these determinations and itself, within itself.

The “I” is *in the first place* purely self-referring unity, and is this not immediately but by abstracting from all determinateness and content and withdrawing into the freedom of unrestricted equality with itself. As such it is *universality*, a unity that is unity with itself only by virtue of its *negative* relating, which appears as abstraction, and because of it contains all determinateness within itself as dissolved. *In second place*, the “I” is just as immediately self-referring negativity, *singularity*, *absolute determinateness* that stands opposed to anything other and excludes it – *individual personality*. This absolute *universality* which is just as immediately absolute *singularization* (...) this universality constitutes the nature of the “I” and of the *concept*⁶⁵.

⁶³ This is also how I think Hegel’s renowned claim that “everything depends on grasping and expressing the ultimate truth not as Substance but as Subject as well” should be read. See PIPPIN, **Hegel’s idealism**, 1989, for Pippin’s reading of it.

⁶⁴ This is also evident at different points throughout the *Logic*, as for instance in the Remark to section “C. Reflection”’s sub-section “External Reflection”: “Reflection is usually taken in a subjective sense as the movement of judgment (...). But at issue here is neither the reflection of consciousness, nor the more specific reflection of the understanding that has the particular and the universal for its determinations, but reflection in general”, SL p. 350. On this, see SIEP, Ludwig, Hegel’s Idea of a Conceptual Scheme. **Inquiry**, vol. 34 n. 1, 1991, pp. 63-76 and HOULGATE, **The Opening**, 2006, pp.139.

⁶⁵ SL pp. 514-15. Here, the relation between thought as objective thought, or the Concept, and the “I” is also better clarified: Hegel affirms that “the “I” is “The pure concept itself, the concept that has come into determinate existence”. By this he means that the experience of the I is an existent instantiation of the structure that he defines as the concept, but that it is not *the* concept, in the sense that the activity of the I as a knowing subject is the only source of objectivity in our experience of the world (as Pippin would have it – see PIPPIN, **Hegel’s Idealism**, 1989, pp. 232-234).

This structure is immediately compared to that of Reciprocity of Action⁶⁶, which closed the Doctrine of essence and, with it, the Objective logic.

This infinite immanent reflection (...) is the *consummation of substance*. But this consummation is no longer the substance itself but is something higher, the concept, the subject. The transition of the relation of substantiality occurs through its own immanent necessity and is nothing more than the manifestation of itself, that the concept is its truth, and that freedom is the truth of necessity⁶⁷.

This structure emerged as the most complete (at least up to the point of its appearance) determination of Being, the first category of the *Logic*.

Throughout the whole Objective logic, Being has gone from being determined as immediately coincident with its determination, to being opposed to Essence, as a unitary source of that very determination. In the Reciprocity of Action, instead, we see that Being (which at this point should not be called like that anymore, but rather *Wirklichkeit*) actually is the whole movement of (1) being referred to itself, as one unitary principle of determination, and (2) having its reference to itself, or unity with itself, being realized only in its determinations, so that it is also immediately opposed to itself within itself, excluding its own determinations and making them immediate⁶⁸.

Understood as this whole movement, or as Reciprocity of Action, *Wirklichkeit* passes into the Concept, as the best new category to grasp it.

What is happening here, then, is that Hegel takes himself to have shown how being, or “the objective” is “spiritual” (as the terms are meant in the above-quoted §24) insofar as being produces its own determinations through a structure, which is the same one through which thought produces its own when considered as “objective thought”.

⁶⁶ The German reads *Wechselwirkung*, where the main term is *Wirkung*, and not *Wechsel*, so that it would be, more literally, a “reciprocal action”: the focus is on the activity, and not on reciprocity as one possible property of action.

⁶⁷ SL, p. 511. Also see pp. 508-11. “*Consummation of substance*” translates “*Vollendung der Substanz*”, an expression which has in itself also an idea of completion, and is therefore more positive than the merely negative “consummation”.

⁶⁸ What I mean here is what Hegel calls “reflected immediacy”. See HENRICH, Dieter. Hegels Logik der Reflexion. Neue Fassung. In: HENRICH, D. (ed.) **Die Wissenschaft der Logik und die Logik der Reflexion. Hegel-Tage Chantilly 1971**, Hegel-Studien, Beiheft 18, 1978.; HOULGATE, Stephen. Essence, Reflexion and Immediacy in Hegel’s Science of Logic. In: _____, Baur, M. (Orgs.). **A Companion to Hegel**. London: Blackwell, 2011, pp. 139-158.

In this sense, then, speculative logic is for Hegel metaphysics: the study of the fundamental structures of thought, conceived as objective thought, coincides with the study of the fundamental structures of being.

This is a very different, and more ambitious, identification of thought and being than Pippin would have it, because it is not limited to the claim that our conceptual structures inevitably shape our understanding of being, but aims at demonstrating that our conceptual structures – at least those of thought conceived as “objective thought” – actually coincide with those of being. Again, this coincidence is not because there is no other way we can conceive of being, but because being *actually*, and so to say “by itself”, independently of our conceiving of it, is revealed to have the same structure as (objective) thought.

It seems, then, that Hegel meant by “metaphysics” something a little bit more ambitious than the study of our conceptual structures in the sense Pippin and “new-wave” metaphysicians means: the *Logic* does not present the structure of the only being we could ever be able to conceive of, but the structure of being *tout-court*.

The question is then if Hegel’s conception of metaphysics can be in line with the “analytic” notion of it, i.e. if it carries out an inquiry into how the world *really* is, but actually excludes any inquiry into an “ultimate” ground accounting for the whole of reality.

Part of the answer to this last question is already contained in what we considered with reference to the Reciprocity of Action and the Concept.

In the structure of Reciprocity of Action and Concept, in fact, we have to sides: the side of determination, and the side of self-relation. Provided that what we are discussing now is the structure of being *tout-court*, and not of our conceptual scheme as our “I” accompanying all of our representations, we can read the side of determination as the side of finite entities, or beings, and the side of self-relation as some unitary entity, or structure, which seems to stand in some grounding relation to the side of determination. After all, the determinations appear to be a product of the self-relation, and therefore to be determinations *of* whatever it is that is self-relating.

It seems then that what is here being thematized is some sort of unitary principle, grounding or justifying the manifold, finite beings that make up reality. In this sense, the object of the *Logic* would not be limited to the structure of being, in the sense “revised metaphysical” interpreters take it to be: it is not just about describing the ontological structures of things that are in the world, but it is also about identifying a unitary principle of some sort, to which these things – or at least the fact of their determination, i.e. the fact that

there are manifold, finite things in the world - seem to be connected. This is actually what Hegel presents as the object of the Doctrine of essence:

The truth of being is essence. Being is the immediate (...). Knowledge (...) penetrates beyond it on the presupposition that (...) this background constitutes the truth of being⁶⁹.

Pace Kreines, then, there seems to be no way around the fact that Hegel is indeed a monist. The question is now if Hegel's monism is of the like of the one seen by Russell and Moore in British Idealism, or if it would comply with Stern's interpretation of it, so that the absolute, or the principle grounding determination, is conceived as "immanent" to determination, and as therefore "immediately equivalent" to the manifold, finite world – being nothing "beyond" or "more" than it.

The first part of the question is easily answered: Hegel's monism does not at all entail a negation of the consistency of particulars.

This is already clear at the very beginning of the Doctrine of essence.

There, we learn that the "truth of being", or the principle grounding determination, should be "in and for itself". This point is also framed in the term's of essence's *Dasein*: essence emerged from Measure as an essential "background" in which all of Being's determinations "negated" themselves. Through this movement of negation, essence appeared as "the truth of being", that is, as the principle on which the determinations of being depend, as their ground. Yet, so conceived, essence has no *Dasein*, or is only "in itself": it accounts for the negation of being's determinations into essence, but doesn't really ground the fact that these determinations existed in the first place. In this sense, essence is both without *Dasein*, because (at this stage) it only consists of the negativity through which the determinations of being refer to it, and is not really unconditioned as the "truth of being" should: it still depends on the presupposition of the very determinations that negate themselves, or are negated, into it. In other words, it is not "for itself" – but "for another", in this case, for the determinations of being, whose existence it presupposes.

⁶⁹ SL, p. 337. Already in the Introduction to the Logic, we read that Objective Logic "It is ontology which objective logic most directly replaces in the first instance, that is, that part of metaphysics intended to investigate the nature of *ens* in general (and *ens* comprises within itself both being and essence (...)). But objective logic comprises within itself also the rest of metaphysics, the metaphysics which sought to comprehend (...) such particular substrata (...) as the soul, the world, and God". SL, p. 42.

The scope of the whole Doctrine of essence, then, is to understand the “unitary background” of being’s determinations not only “in itself” but also “for itself”, clarifying how exactly it is that this “background” acquires *Dasein*, how it produces its determinations.

Essence, as the complete turning back of being into itself, is thus at first the indeterminate essence; the determinacies of being are sublated in it; it holds them *in itself* but without their being posited *in it*. Absolute essence in this simple unity with itself has *no existence*. But it must pass over into existence, for it is *being-in-and-for-itself*; that is to say, it *differentiates* the determinations which it holds *in itself*, (...) and is infinite being-for-itself only in so far as in thus differentiating itself from itself it is in unity with itself⁷⁰.

To achieve such an understanding of essence is not an easy task. The peculiarity of determination is its being “other”, or “opposite” from essence, so that any attempt at linking the existence of determination to essence ends up “betraying” this characteristic: conceived as determinations *of* essence, determinations are conceived as merely instrumental to the essence’s identity with itself. In other words, they are not “other” from essence, but are immediately seen as parts, or emanations, of it. This way, the peculiar character of determination – which resides in its radically individual and contingent element - ends up being lost.

In essence (...) the determinateness does not *exist*; it is *posited* only by the essence itself, not free but only with *reference* to the unity of the essence. – The (...) determinations are *reflected* – posited by the essence itself in which they remain as sublated⁷¹.

Even though the solution to this dilemma is only achieved at the end of Objective Logic, the core structure of the movement through which essence acquires *Dasein* is already presented in the section “C.Reflection”. Namely, this is shown in the movement of “Determining reflection”, as the union of “Positing” and “External reflection”.

In “Positing reflection”, the problem of considering determination as merely instrumental to essence’s self-reference, and as merely “part” of its identity with itself is presented: here, determination is considered as nothing but a “posit” of essence – something essence “posits” for itself. This way, determination is at first considered as something “only negative”: it is always-already-negated in its “essential background”, it has no consistence for

⁷⁰ SL, p. 338.

⁷¹ SL, p. 339.

itself. So here determination is only the negative of essence, and is supposedly produced by a simple negation: essence negates itself and poses a part of itself as determination. Vice versa, since it is nothing but the negation of essence, this negation also works the other way around, as a movement through which determination as a posit is immediately negated in its consistence as determination, and is immediately rejoined with essence.

Yet, in observing the movement of Positing reflection up-close, we see that it doesn't really work as easily: essence itself – as was already shown in its emergence through Measure – is nothing but this movement of negation, of returning to itself from the negation of determination.

As it has come to be here, however, essence is what it is, not through a negativity foreign to it, but through one which is its own – the infinite movement of being (...). It is itself this negativity, the self-sublation of otherness and of determinateness⁷².

So the negation, which is supposed to produce determination as a posit, is not a simple one, but a double one: it is negation of the negation (or better, negativity) that essence, as “Positing reflection”, is. In this sense, determination is not a mere negation, which reconnects it immediately to essence and makes it devoid of any consistency of its own. Rather, it is the negation of this negation, and in this sense it is posited in such a way, that it does not have any immediate tie to essence anymore – its dependence on essence, provided by its negating itself immediately into it, is so to say “hidden”, so that it appears not as something immediately “of” essence (as a manifestation or emanation), but as something other, radically independent from it. For this reason, every “posit” is actually a “presupposition”: something that essence negates as if it were something entirely “other” from it.

The sublated immediacy is, contrariwise, the turning back into itself, essence that arrives at itself, simple being equal to itself. This arriving at itself is thus the sublating of itself and self-repelling, presupposing reflection, and its repelling of itself from itself is the arriving at itself⁷³.

This way, essence appears not as “Positing reflection” anymore, but as “External reflection”: as if essence was some external activity applied to something other than itself “from the outside”.

⁷² SL, p. 338.

⁷³ SL, p. 348.

Already from the analysis of “Positing reflection”, we can see how this is also not true: determination is indeed produced by essence, only not through a simple, but through a double negation. And in fact, negating determination as if it was something external, which should then be reduced to essence, only produces a negation of the negation which “hid” the negation of determination as a posit. Yet, we have also already seen how this cannot result in an absorption of determination into essence: in recognizing the presupposition as a posit – that is, in reconnecting determination with itself, or in referring determination to itself – essence is only referring a negation back to its negativity, and is caught immediately and all over again in the movement of double negation, which produces determination in all of its “otherness”, “externality” and “contingency”. It is this very “otherness” and “externality”, which realizes essence’s identity with itself, and not the negation of it as a mere appearance devoid of any consistency.

What Hegel is saying here is that essence, or the “truth of being”, is nothing but this movement of “*absolute internal counter-repelling*”⁷⁴: all to the opposite of being an all-encompassing substance denying any determination, it is always-immediately “self-repelled” into its other; it is only realized in determination and in its internal separation of itself from itself.

This certainly demonstrates that Hegel’s monism is radically different from the traditional one: the “truth of being” is not a substance laying “beyond” being, absorbing and suppressing being’s otherness and determination. Rather, it appears to be some sort of negativity, somehow immanently pervading determination, animating it and actually giving it full consistency. This seems to plead to Stern’s case: in Hegel’s monism the absolute is immanent and entirely coincides with the domain of determination and being.

But does it mean, as Stern suggests, that we can make without the question as to why is there something, and not anything at all? Does it mean that there is *nothing* grounding what Stern calls the necessity of being?

This doesn’t seem to be the case: at the end of the discussion of Determining reflection, Hegel remarks how, if we consider essence as immediately coincident with determination, we “lose” essence’s “equality with itself”:

Determining reflection is for this reason reflection that has exited from itself; the equality of essence with itself is lost in the negation, and negation

⁷⁴ SL, p. 348.

predominates⁷⁵.

This is the other side of the problem of the Doctrine of Essence: through the Doctrine of Being and Measure, determination has already proved itself to be unable to account for itself without referring to some unitary “background”, actually negating itself into it. But then, how to make sense of this essential side of determination, without “betraying” its just as much essential “otherness” and “contingency”? Hegel provides an argument for this in his discussion of Absolute necessity, which concludes the Chapter “*Wirklichkeit*” in the homonymous section, which also concludes the whole Doctrine of Essence.

In Absolute necessity, we see the self-referring side of essence, throughout the chapter identified with possibility, entirely coincide with the side of the determination, here identified with actuality.

Absolute necessity (...) is being which in its negation, in essence, refers itself to itself and is being. It is equally simple immediacy or *pure being* and simple immanent reflection or *pure essence*; it is this, that the two are one and the same. – The absolutely necessary only *is* because it *is*; it otherwise has neither condition nor ground⁷⁶.

This seems at first as a full recognition of the radical contingency of being: there is nothing but being, being is “because it is”, and the absolute is just immediately identified with it. Yet, the sub-section ends with rather dark and disquieting tones: Absolute necessity is defined as “blind” and as “averse to light” (*das Lichtscheue*)⁷⁷. With these expressions, Hegel is trying to capture a very different form of “suffocation” of determination: here, determination is not suffocated because it is suppressed within the absolute, but it is suffocated because it is immediately identified with the absolute. This makes it the opposite of what it is: determination is once again not recognized in its otherness from the absolute, in its extreme particularity, or in its contingency.

But this contingency is rather absolute necessity; it is the essence of those free, inherently necessary actualities. This essence is averse to light, because there is no reflective shining in these actualities, no reflex – because they are grounded purely in themselves, are shaped for themselves, manifest themselves only to themselves – because they are only being. – But their

⁷⁵ SL, p. 352.

⁷⁶ SL, p. 487. For a compelling commentary of this passage, see HOULGATE, Stephen. Necessity and Contingency in Hegel’s Science of Logic. *The Owl of Minerva*, vol. 27 n. 1, 1995, pp. 37–49.

⁷⁷ SL, p. 488.

essence will break forth in them and will reveal what it is and what they are⁷⁸.

So not only the moment of identification, but also the moment of opposition and separation between determination and its unitary background is needed: only through the latter, determination has its radical otherness from the absolute, its distinct “freedom” and “contingency”⁷⁹. As already shown in Reflection – although at an embryonic stage - determination’s immediacy is true immediacy only through the whole movement of reflection: without the negation of immediacy in the absolute that posits it, there also won’t be the absolute’s “counter-repelling”, which makes the absolute non-substantial and poses determination in all of their contingency. So the question as to “why is there anything at all, and not nothing” needs to be asked, not to “absorb” determinations into their essence or ground, but precisely to fully account for their immediacy, contingency, and freedom.

5. Conclusions

It seems clear that Hegel’s metaphysics exceeds all the three notions of metaphysics that have been sketched above: it is neither “new wave”, nor “analytic” nor “non-analytic”, if the latter is taken to coincide with outdated monism denying the consistency of particulars.

The scope of Hegel’s metaphysics is not bound to limits of our thought as a conceptual scheme, and it is true that Hegel’s concept of the absolute is “immanent”, in the sense that it is nothing but “counter-repelling” negativity, which lays nowhere “beyond” being and its determination, and which is actually “realized” in determinations. In this sense, Hegel’s monism is clearly different from that of the British Idealists: there’s no “all-encompassing substance” negating the consistency of determination. Yet, Hegel’s monism is without any compromise: the side of the absolute’s self-reference and identity with itself, even though not substantial, is not left aside, and the question as to “why is there anything at all” plays a crucial role into preserving being’s contingency.

⁷⁸ SL, p. 488.

⁷⁹ This point, even though in the context of a very different conclusion as to how to interpret the passage of Absolute Necessity into Absolute Relation, is masterfully clarified in EMUNDTS, Dina. Die Lehre vom Wesen. Dritter Abschnitt. Die Wirklichkeit. In: Quante, M.; Mooren, N. (Orgs.). **Kommentar zu Hegels Wissenschaft der Logik**. Hamburg: Felix Meiner, 2017, pp. 387-456, pp. 432-434. See the whole text for in-depth commentary of the whole “*Wirklichkeit*” section.

Thus, Hegel's understanding of metaphysics does exceed the "analytic" conception of it, and should be considered "non-analytic". Yet, his monism is not vulnerable to the charges which make it "outdated" in the eyes of contemporary authors.

To the contrary, it comes with an argument as to how a monistic perspective is necessary in order to preserve the contingency of being which is so dear to "analytic metaphysics". Hegel's metaphysics, then, has arguments to turn the meta-philosophical assumptions which determine our understanding of what is "in" and what is "out" in metaphysics on their head, and also provides new insights for the advancement of metaphysical inquiry towards "new", and more "ambitious" questions.

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