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(Review)

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Hegels Phänomenologie des Geistes: Ein dialogischer Kommentar. Volume 1: Gewißheit und Vernunft. Volume 2: Geist und Religion by **Pirmin Stekeler (Review)**

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Pirmin Stekeler. *Hegels Phänomenologie des Geistes: Ein dialogischer Kommentar*. Volume 1: *Gewißheit und Vernunft*. Volume 2: *Geist und Religion*. Hamburg: F. Meiner, 2014. Vol. 1: Pp. 1253. Cloth, €68.00. Vol. 2: Pp. 1088. Cloth, €48.00.

The author is past vice president of both the international Hegel Society and the German Ludwig Wittgenstein society and has previously published books on logic, analytic philosophy, and Hegel (under the full name Stekeler-Weithofer). He describes himself as interested in the “reconstruction of the relationship between traditional philosophy (Plato, Kant, Hegel) and the formal-analytic movement (Frege, Wittgenstein, Carnap, Quine),” and this new work is fully representative of this interest. Explicitly eschewing any interest in “archival” history of philosophy, Stekeler offers a “rational reconstruction” of what he takes to be the *argument* of Hegel’s *Phenomenology of Spirit*. He does so by means of a “dialogical commentary” on what he describes as, next to Kant’s first *Critique*, “methodologically considered, the most important philosophical work of the last 300 years” (1:24).

The declared aim of Stekeler’s “commentary” is simply “to make Hegel’s book readable (or more readable)” (1:23) and to do so by offering a new overall interpretation of the same. Whereas Hegel remains (allegedly) “banned” from the undergraduate and graduate curriculum of American colleges and universities (1:25), Stekeler proposes to remedy this situation by bringing him into a productive dialogue with the “formal-analytic” tradition. Stekeler, however, is more interested in articulating a specific set of issues and defending a specific conception of what philosophy is or should be. He finds this program obscurely present in Hegel, but declares that he is less concerned with demonstrating that this actually is Hegel’s position than with developing the position itself. Thus he maintains correctly that his “commentary” should be comprehensible on its own, entirely apart from anything that Hegel actually wrote (1:22–23).

Stekeler’s dialogical commentary on the *Phenomenology* possesses one enormous advantage over all others, however, in that it is not filled with paraphrases and direct quotation from Hegel’s text because it includes the *entire text* of Hegel’s work. Each volume begins with a lengthy and often dense introduction, in which the author indicates his approach to the text and develops in broad strokes his innovative interpretation of it. These introductions are followed by commentary in which a paragraph from Hegel is followed by at least one and usually many more paragraphs by Stekeler. One wishes this very effective format were adopted more widely. The commentary itself, though sometimes unavoidably repetitive, is insightful, imaginative, and philosophically sophisticated.

The philosopher who emerges from Stekeler’s reading is neither a dogmatic materialist nor an advocate of “scientism”; nor is he a supernaturalist or “metaphysician” of any stripe, and specifically not an exponent of the “metaphysics of spirit.” Nor is he a crypto-theologian whose “absolute” is just another name for God, nor a conservative apologist for the Prussian state, nor a proto-totalitarian advocate of the subordination of the individual to the state or to “world history.” Indeed, he does not have a “system” at all, nor assert any philosophical “theses” (1:17). Instead, he is “the philosopher of the personal subject and of freedom and the logician of subjectivity and hence of modernity” (1:13).

According to Stekeler’s anti-metaphysical reading, *Geist* is a term for what is “generically human,” a transcendental “we” comparable to Rousseau’s *volonté générale*, and absolute spirit is identical to the community of rational beings, often interpreted here as a community of language users. *Geist* is “the recognized communal [*gemeinsame*] system of those forms of praxis and those institutions which first make possible cooperative acting and communicative speech and thereby also make possible individual acting and thinking” (2:115).

“All transsubjective normativity is founded in co-operative role-structure of communal action and life” (2:21), and it is only by actively participating in this “universal form of *praxis*” that one *becomes a personal* subject through shared cultural traditions. Moreover, spirit is *actual* only in the concrete form of the individual person who has been cultivated by communal norms. “Hegel’s *Phenomenology* is thus an analysis of the generic forms of cooperation, which essentially co-determine all normative correctness whether of truth or of

moral goodness, and are, precisely for this reason, primarily constitutive of the inner form of the spirituality of the human being as a personal subjectivity or as a person conscious of his subjectivity" (1:41). We normally recognize the role of these communal forms only *implicitly* by permitting them to determine our inferences and our actions; it is only in philosophy that this becomes *explicit*, and "spirit" is no longer misunderstood as a transcendent God.

The celebrated *Weltgeist* is simply another name for its only appropriate *institution*: spirit as a whole in the form of *Wissenschaft* or "science" (2:1010)—"though hardly any readers have recognized this" (2:14). "Absolute knowing" coincides with philosophizing, which, properly understood, consists purely in the logical analysis of the structure and forms of *Geist* itself (2:987). Hegel also calls this "speculative knowing," which simply means meta-level logical reflection upon all forms of spirit, but specifically upon *Wissen* itself (1:44). In the end, however, absolute knowing is not limited to philosophy, but includes all forms of *Wissenschaft*, a communally undertaken enterprise through which we develop and gain collective control over our normal forms of inference and expectations, and thereby over our collective actions (2:986).

Hegel's vaunted "concept" or *Begriff* designates the entire network of meanings and material inferences that are implicitly presupposed in our everyday practices of speaking, knowing, and doing. This system accompanies every intuition and orients and guides all our practices, theoretical and practical, by providing us with "norms" for evaluating them (2:1003). Accordingly, Hegel's *Phenomenology* is really concerned with "typical assertions, i.e., with the *manners of appearance* of the spiritual: in reason, in understanding, and, above all, in consciousness" (1:28). The aim of the *Phenomenology* is to let these same forms "show themselves." Hegel does this by beginning with various aporia, which are then resolved dialectically via arguments that make explicit (*für uns*) certain implicit (*an sich*) norms of correct knowing and acting, which thereby display their own inadequacies.

Such a method unequivocally rejects all claims to immediacy and all foundationalist conceptions of philosophical argumentation. All our reflections begin with specific problems, and thus with implicit assumptions, and the goal of philosophy is simply to bring these to light and to examine them, with the hope of improving our "inferential practices." Hence, "phenomenology, in Hegel's sense, is the continuation of transcendental philosophy as a critique of meaning," which reveals that there is simply no immediate access either to the world or to ourselves (2:18).

By pursuing this phenomenological method, which Stekeler frequently describes as the dialectical analysis of meaning (*die Methode sinnanalytischer Dialektik*), the philosopher not only succeeds in making explicit certain contradictions or tensions implicit in our ordinary forms of inference and linguistic practices, but makes us explicitly aware for the first time of these forms themselves, thus making possible further progress toward making explicit additional forms. But he is always aware that "one cannot make everything explicit," since "correct understanding is always practical," which is to say, always has an implicit dimension (1:35).

This is clearly no "introduction" to Hegel's text nor "guide" for the perplexed. Indeed, readers without prior acquaintance with the *Phenomenology* are likely to become discouraged by Stekeler's commentary. It is a sophisticated and original interpretation of the *Phenomenology*, which explicitly challenges, while largely ignoring, virtually all previous readings. It presupposes close familiarity with the canonical texts and problems of analytic philosophy and, specifically, with the kind of inferentialist semantics developed by Robert Brandom under the influence of Wilfred Sellars. For this reason, it is likely to be ignored or rejected out of hand by more traditionally oriented scholars. This would be regrettable, however, since one can only welcome efforts such as this to demonstrate the contemporary relevance of Hegel's philosophy by recasting it in a more contemporary idiom and showing its relevance to current philosophical debates.

It remains an open question whether the views developed so rigorously and ingeniously by Stekeler actually resemble Hegel's own views and are consistent with what we actually know about his project and his intentions. Stekeler professes to have little interest in

such questions, so anyone who does will have to turn to more “archival” and “contextual” scholarship.

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Sandra Lapointe and Clinton Tolley, editors. *New Anti-Kant*. History of Analytic Philosophy, 7. Hampshire-New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014. Pp. xii + 295. Cloth, \$95.00.

New Anti-Kant is the title of the book. New? Yes, it was a *new* Anti-Kant when it was first published in 1850. Another *Anti-Kant*, this one by Benedikt Stattler, had appeared in 1788—the year in which František Příhonský, the author of *New Anti-Kant*, was born. Příhonský is well-known as the editor of Bernard Bolzano’s brilliant posthumous booklet *Paradoxien des Unendlichen*, which appeared in 1851 and was quoted with great respect by a number of eminent mathematicians, Richard Dedekind, Georg Cantor, and Bertrand Russell among them. Only a few copies of Příhonský’s *Anti-Kant* survived. It took more than 150 years for a new German edition of the book to be published in 2003 (in *Beiträge zur Bolzano-Forschung*, Sankt Augustin: Academia Verlag). Lapointe, who had already edited a French translation of the book in 2006, now provides, together with Tolley, a careful English edition.

As the subtitle of the book tells us, it is an “Examination of the *Critique of Pure Reason* according to the Concepts Laid Down in Bolzano’s *Theory of Science*.” The potential scholarly interest for such a book is all the greater because the attention paid to Bolzano’s philosophy has grown tremendously over the course of the last few decades. For Bolzano was an important part of the process that led to the publication of *New Anti-Kant*. Not only did Příhonský write the book as the result of Bolzano’s encouragement, under his supervision, but considerable parts of the book were adopted verbatim from Bolzano’s *Theory of Science* and from his correspondence with Franz Exner.

For Bolzano, Kant’s doctrines had always been somewhat like a philosophical anvil. Bolzano’s critical discussions of Kant’s philosophy permeate Bolzano’s two main works, the *Theory of Science* and the *Textbook of the Science of Religion*, providing their subject matter with a number of comments and notes scattered about his works. To gather these views in a systematic way was to be the task ascribed to his friend and pupil, Příhonský.

In the main text of the book, the “Treatise,” Příhonský goes, step by step, through the *Critique of Pure Reason*. He always presents, first, Kant’s relevant doctrines, either in Kant’s own words or in a short summary. He then proceeds to assess it critically, mostly using Bolzano’s concepts and citing his doctrines. Příhonský restricts himself for the most part to Kant’s doctrines as presented in the *Critique of Pure Reason*, the only exception being Kant’s views on ethics (187–206) in which case his *Critique of Practical Reason* and his *Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals* are also taken into account.

Lapointe and Tolley have done a splendid editorial job. The main challenge for the editors resided in the fact that Příhonský’s *New Anti-Kant* deals with two divergent philosophical systems that are presented in two divergent philosophical languages. The difficulties associated with providing appropriate translations of Kant’s works are notorious, but in this case the translation of Kant’s German had in addition to be matched with Bolzano’s German. And even Bolzano’s relatively plain German offered several different terminological alternatives. While it would be a near-miracle if everybody agreed with the editors’ decisions, no problem will arise from their decisions, given the glossary they included (148–53).

Příhonský’s complete text comprises xxiv and 233 pages, which makes for roughly 130 pages of the translation. The editors’ illuminating introduction already makes clear most of what has to be said on the text itself so that the book does not need additional commentaries. The editors, however, add four papers on topics closely related to the main theme of the book—Kant and Bolzano. The comparison between Kant’s and Bolzano’s views pertain