

James Kreines. *Reason in the World: Hegel's Metaphysics and its Philosophical Appeal.* Oxford University Press 2015. 304 pp. \$74.00 USD (Hardcover ISBN 9780190204303).

Since Robert Pippin's 1989 *Hegel's Idealism* there has been much scholarly literature that has emphasized Hegel's relation to Kant's critical philosophy. Pippin and others have argued that Hegel's central project should be read as a continuation and radicalization of Kant's Copernican turn in philosophy. One of the motivations for this interpretation of Hegel was a desire to show that Hegel was not guilty of relapsing into pre-critical metaphysics, but rather took Kant's lessons seriously. These scholars also oppose the image of Hegel who embraces an extravagant metaphysics, such as the view that all things inhere in one spiritual substance.

Interpretations of this sort, however, tend to provide a deflationary reading of Hegel's metaphysical ambitions, turning him primarily into an epistemological anti-realist, or else into a pragmatist concerned with our practices of reason giving. This kind of deflationary reading faces two problems. First, it is forced to explain away multiple passages in Hegel where he seems to embrace an ambitious metaphysics. Second, one might argue that such a reading takes away what is most interesting in Hegel's philosophy, and that it fails to find in Hegel interesting alternatives to the current mainstream views.

Kreines' book does argue that Hegel takes Kant's challenge to metaphysics seriously, and that Hegel does not lapse into pre-critical rationalism, still less into spiritualistic monism. However, Kreines' Hegel is not a deflationist about metaphysics either. On the contrary, Kreines argues that the organizing focus of Hegel's project is metaphysical, and that whatever else Hegel has to say, for example, about epistemological issues, should be understood in the context of his overarching metaphysical project. More specifically, Kreines' Hegel is engaged in developing a metaphysics of 'reason in the world', which is a 'metaphysical side... of the notion of explanation' (8). That is, Kreines argues that since positivistic accounts which identify explanation with some form of argument are problematic, and purely pragmatic accounts do not provide enough constraints to rule out explanations which seem to be illegitimate (say, astrological), there is a need for a metaphysical side to explanation. By this he means, very generally, that some items in the world are reasons for other items in the world.

Kreines takes Hegel's version of the metaphysics of reason in the world to consist, most fundamentally, in what he calls the 'concept thesis'. It claims that 'the reasons that explain why things are as they are and do what they do are always found in immanent "concepts" (*Begriffe*), akin to immanent universals or kinds (*Gattungen*)' (22). For example, all physical objects belong to the kind 'matter', in virtue of which they are governed by mechanical laws. They also belong to more specific kinds, such as specific chemical compounds, which explain why they have the properties they have and behave the way they do. Living beings also belong to biological kinds, and humans in addition belong to the rational kind which Hegel calls 'spirit'. Moreover, the immanent concepts form a hierarchy. In particular, the concepts of biological kinds are more intelligible than the 'lower' concepts of mechanical matter and of specific kinds of matter, and the concept of spirit is more intelligible still.

This metaphysics, while not as extravagant as that of spiritualist monism, is nevertheless ambitious and controversial, especially insofar as it concerns biological organisms (and 'spirit'). In

addition, the very project centered around the metaphysics of reason, or the ‘metaphysics-first’ philosophy, faces a number of objections, both from representatives of certain contemporary views, and from Kant (which latter return us to the question of Hegel’s relation to Kant). However, it is the controversial character of this metaphysics which makes it interesting to readers besides historians of philosophy. I will now briefly discuss these objections and Hegelian responses to them as reconstructed by Kreines.

One kind of objection challenges the very idea of ‘metaphysics-first’ philosophy. Before attempting to provide a metaphysical system, the objection goes, one must investigate something else and see whether it is possible to provide such a system. Sometimes an objection of this kind claims that we must start with issues concerning knowledge or justification, and thus engage in an ‘epistemology-first’ project. In the ‘Analytic’ of the first *Critique* Kant offered a version of this attack against metaphysics. Other versions of this objection recommend starting with issues concerning intentionality, such as the conditions of possibility of our thought or our language being *about* anything at all (a ‘semantics-first’ project).

Concerning this family of objections, Kreines says that they all claim that there is something problematic about the domain of metaphysics such that we need first to assure ourselves that we can fruitfully work in that domain. However, it is not clear why the domains promoted by these objections (say, epistemology) are *not* problematic in this sense. If they are, though, we likewise need to investigate, say, the possibility of obtaining knowledge about epistemological issues before starting our epistemological project. It is easy to see that here one either faces an infinite regress or is forced to assume that some domains are unproblematic as far as the possibility of knowledge (aboutness, etc.) is concerned. But then it is not clear why we cannot say the same about the domain of metaphysics.

Another objection claims that while a ‘metaphysics-first’ approach is in principle legitimate, scientific discoveries of the mechanisms underlying various phenomena have shown that ‘anything like immanent concepts would be superfluous’ (35). One way to articulate this idea is to say that everything in nature is to be explained by appealing to its parts and not to its kind. The Hegelian response to this ‘pure mechanism’ objection is simple: it never succeeds in providing any explanation, since no matter what level of decomposition of an object into its parts we consider, according to our hypothesis that level cannot be explanatory, for now it is *its parts* that are supposed to do the explanatory work. In fact, scientific explanations do appeal to immanent concepts of, say, electrons, and without such an appeal they would not explain anything. As Kreines argues, various refinements of the mechanism objection do not work either. What this shows is that we need immanent concepts at least on *some* level.

One can also oppose the metaphysics of immanent concepts from an empiricist standpoint. One can argue that such objective concepts are metaphysically objectionable and also superfluous in that there are less objectionable and more parsimonious ways to account for the notion of explanation. An empiricist would appeal, for example, to natural laws understood in a broadly Humean way. This account of laws takes them to consist in nothing but empirical generalizations. Explanations of phenomena would then involve appealing to laws understood in this way.

Kreines’ Hegelian response to empiricism is twofold. First, he claims that a closer examination shows that empiricism employs metaphysical machinery of its own, and it is not obvious that it

is less objectionable than that of Hegel himself. Second, Kreines argues that empiricism is inferior to Hegel's metaphysics of reason in the world because it gets the direction of explanation wrong. For example, an empiricist explains particular phenomena by appealing to laws which are understood as empirical generalizations. But an empiricist also claims that such generalizations depend upon the generalized particular phenomena in a way similar to how a mosaic pattern depends upon the many tiles which compose it (68). Therefore an empiricist explains phenomena by appealing to something which depends on them, which seems backwards: scientists want to uncover something *more* fundamental than individual phenomena in order to explain them. By contrast, Hegel's appeal to immanent concepts, some of which (but not all) account for laws, gets the direction of explanation right.

Kreines thinks that the most powerful challenge to any metaphysics comes from Kant. Unlike other scholars, however, he argues that this challenge comes not from Kant's positive project of the 'Analytic', but from the 'Dialectic'. There Kant argues that reason drives us to seek not just explanations, but *complete* explanations (the unconditioned). Now, Kant also argues that such a search inevitably leads reason into contradictions (the antinomies). Kant concludes that complete explanations are unobtainable, and we must restrict our search for explanations to the bounds of experience.

Hegel responds to this by showing that antinomies are actually generated not by going beyond the bounds of experience, but by an ambiguity in our conception of complete explainers. Briefly, we take complete explainers to be *both* ultimate substrates for things, and that which can be fully understood through itself. Now, Kreines argues that nothing can play both roles. Hegel, then, abandons a search for ultimate substrates, but argues there are things which are completely intelligible through themselves. This not only constitutes Hegel's response to Kant's challenge, but explains much about the structure of Hegel's own metaphysics: for him the most intelligible things are in fact rational beings. In general, Hegel divorces the intelligibility and dependence which Kant and pre-Kantian philosophers ran together.

A review cannot do full justice to the details of Kreines' arguments and the extent to which he brings Hegel into dialogue with contemporary philosophy (and some of the most interesting and controversial discussions, such as Kreines' chapter on Hegel's account of teleology in living organisms, were not even touched upon). Much may and should be added to the defense of Hegel against contemporary objections. Kreines' book, however, makes a big step toward reconstructing Hegelian metaphysics and giving it renewed vitality.

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