



## Philosophical Review

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Review

Reviewed Work(s): Hegel's Critique of Metaphysics by Béatrice Longuenesse and Nicole J. Simek

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Source: *The Philosophical Review*, Vol. 121, No. 3 (JULY 2012), pp. 472-474

Published by: Duke University Press on behalf of Philosophical Review

Stable URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/44282268>

Accessed: 19-06-2019 18:40 UTC

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## BOOK REVIEWS

Béatrice Longuenesse, *Hegel's Critique of Metaphysics*. Translated by Nicole J. Simek. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007. xxi + 246 pp.

*Hegel's Critique of Metaphysics* consists of two parts whose composition is separated by a decade. The first is a translation of Longuenesse's *Hegel et la Critique de la Métaphysique* (1981), and the second contains two papers from the early 1990s. The parts are unified by their subject matter, Hegel's *Science of Logic*, though they differ in that the first deals primarily with the second book of Hegel's *Logic* (the Doctrine of Essence) and the second with the third book (the Doctrine of the Concept). Furthermore, though they are partially unified in outlook on Hegel—since both parts take Hegel's relation to Kant to be fundamental—they differ substantially in what they make of that relation. Given constraints of space, I will say only the following about the second part: it contains two very good papers that are important reading for anyone interested in the relation between Kant and Hegel, and the preface includes a concise and intriguing examination of the difference between the two parts.

The heart of the book is clearly the first part's leveraging of Hegel's relation to Kant to motivate specific readings of the concepts of reflection in the Doctrine of Essence. As Longuenesse constructs Hegel's view, it is in opposition to both empiricism and dogmatic rationalism. Hegel both denies that appearances provide the ultimate foundation or content of thought *and* that there is anything else behind the appearances on which they could be grounded: "There is nothing other than appearance, nothing beyond appearance. And yet, appearance is not what is true" (7). This then leads Hegel to search for the principles of unity of objects within appearances, and he frames this search by use of the idea of reflection. Engaging with Dieter Henrich's work, Longuenesse traces the development of Hegel's thinking on reflection. At first, Hegel thinks of reflection as negative: the understanding's destruction of unity. But then he starts to see it as a necessary stage, an indispensable tool for philosophy. Finally, in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, he distinguishes between external and absolute reflection, where the latter is reflection not on objects but on reflection's own modes of determination, where this is the reflection of their content in itself. In terms of the *Logic*, this notion of absolute reflection entails that there is a subject and an object, but the subject is the concept's unifying function, and the object is whatever is unified. Reflection is therefore the interplay between the subjective activity of unification of determinations and the resistance of those determinations, and thus reflection is an element of the absolute: "The dimension of alterity and the discrete concatenation of determinations subsists in reflection. But this alterity is the alterity of thought within itself, and the concatenation of determinations is guided by an immanent unifying ground" (33). To say that reflection is a positive element in the Absolute destroys pre-Kantian metaphysics because we no longer look for the "ontologi-

cal secret" (Hyppolite) behind the appearances—but rather within appearances “for the movement of thought by which the determinations of things that a non-critical thought takes to be ontological (or in Kant’s words, transcendently real) are constituted” (35–36).

Longuenesse then turns this general framework to an account of Hegel’s conceptions of contradiction, ground, and modality. Unfortunately, there is not room in a short review to do justice to Longuenesse’s many detailed arguments and insightful readings of Hegel’s text. In particular, the discussion of ground is one of the very best in the literature. As a way of considering in somewhat more detail the application of the framework described above, consider Longuenesse’s insightful expression of the relation between Hegel and Kant on modality:

Hegel owes to Kant the idea that the modal categories express nothing other than the degree of unity between existence and a unified system of thought-determinations. But he opposes Kant in that for him, that unity leaves no room on the side of existence for a world of the beyond. And on the side of thought-determinations, the unity brought about by reflection is not that of an immutable subject faced with an object external to it. Rather, it is that of a thought process that is immanent to existence, and transformed in its very forms by its confrontation with multiplicity. (119)

Though there is much to be said specifically for framing the relation between Hegel and Kant in this way, I do worry that the emphasis on unity versus multiplicity partially obscures the radical nature of Hegel’s thinking about contingency and modality in general. Hegel thinks of actuality as a form of expression or self-manifestation, and as such the primary danger is not multiplicity but rather externality as opposed to an internal orientation of expression. And though the oppositions between unity and multiplicity, on the one hand, and internality and externality, on the other hand, are closely related, whether the contingent is in itself unitary or dispersed is not directly relevant to its tendency to disorient the process of expression. The emphasis on the relation to Kant in Longuenesse’s account obscures this feature in the same move in which it (accurately) highlights the greater internality of existence to reflection in Hegel’s account. For example, “Of course it is true that thought cannot be satisfied with the contingent, since the latter manifests the impossibility of completely taking up the given into the synthesis of the ‘I think’ . The goal of thinking is to reduce contingency” (129). The emphasis in Longuenesse’s account is on the penetration of the determinations of existence by thought, but the retaining of the generally Kantian schema of the opposition of the activity of thought to its objects seems to lead her to underestimate the penetration in the opposite direction (though it is clearly acknowledged in the longer passage quoted above, and in the recognition of Hegel’s criticism of Leibniz as leaving “no room for the unpredictable character of the activity of determination and uni-

## BOOK REVIEWS

fication, for the play of the manifold against the unifying effort of thought” [133–34]). To extend a metaphor used by Longuenesse on the following page, even if the concept has “digested all otherness” (120), this digestion is just as much indigestion. So, for example, Longuenesse sees in Hegel’s claim that the possible has being or existence the view that the actual becomes the criterion of possibility, which view introduces a form of contingency that is later absorbed by absolute necessity (126). On Longuenesse’s interpretation, the possible does not retain its character when it becomes coextensive with actuality and necessity (except as a kind of resistant multiplicity, where the distinction between actuality and possibility becomes a matter of external reflection that is subsequently eliminated in absolute modality).

Perhaps the deemphasis of internality and externality here is connected with Longuenesse’s own criticism of her early work, namely, that it treats Hegel’s *Logic* as primarily theoretical rather than also practical (xix–xx), for surely the important function of Kant’s moral law is to provide an internal principle of action, rather than unifying our natural capacities or inclinations. This has important consequences for Longuenesse’s later view since a recognition of the important role of contingency and externality even in Hegel’s most idealist conceptions of the Absolute substantially blunts the discomfort associated with his infinite standpoint, but that is an argument for another day. The work in *Hegel’s Critique of Metaphysics* is of the highest quality and has the added biographical benefit of showing two substantially different stages in Longuenesse’s engagement with Kant and Hegel.

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*Philosophical Review*, Vol. 121, No. 3, 2012  
DOI 10.1215/00318108-1574499