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Alfredo Ferrarin: ***Il pensare e l'io. Hegel e la critica di Kant*****. Roma, Carocci Editori, 2016, 244 pp. ISBN: 978-88-430-8246-9.**

LUIGI FILIERI[1]

In this carefully argued study, Alfredo Ferrarin sets out to renew our understanding of Hegel's idealism. Between pages 24 and 30 of the introduction the author shows how Hegel aimed at subverting what seems to be commonly known, by continuously renewing the meanings of all concepts. In this book, Ferrarin shares the same goal: he aims at proving that many recent common interpretations of Hegel are based on arbitrary and implicit presuppositions and readings which are often constructed to contribute to current philosophical debate rather than a proper understanding of Hegel. Though this is not the sole purpose of Ferrarin's study, it clearly represents one of its main methodological aims. Accordingly, all five chapters address Hegel's idea of critique, intended as his philosophical method. The topics covered by the study are: i) the distinction between the idea of subjectivity and the idea that all philosophy must begin with the concept of the "I" (on the presupposition that all thought activity is exercised by the "I"); ii) the discussion of Hegel's account of thinking which cannot be reduced to the activity of the "I" (least of all to the activity of the human being); iii) the spontaneity of thought and its reification in the form of finite determinations; iv) the relationship between "representation" and "concept"in Hegel's *Logic*. Chapter five deserves a brief specific note. It indeed contains a comparison between Kant's and Hegel's respective notions of philosophy. More precisely, Ferrarin describes Hegel's critique of Kant as biased and arbitrary and provokingly tries to imagine how Kant might have answered Hegel's objections.

The key topics of chapter one, which deals with Hegel's concept of recognition, are self-consciousness, individuality and intersubjectivity.The core thesis of this chapter is that recognition does not ground self-consciousness. On the contrary, self-consciousness is preliminary to the possibility of recognition. However, this does not mean that self-consciousness is an original given but rather that self-consciousness is always the self-consciousness of a self-comprehending substance. According to this line of argument, the "I" is not the owner of self-consciousness but a manifestation (among others) of the substance insofar as it comprehends itself as the subject of its own development. Ferrarin stresses that Hegel's account of subjectivity goes beyond the subjectivity of the "I". This subjectivity strives to emerge from unconsciousness but when the "I" tries to rely on its own concept as a starting point, its subjectivity proves partial and evasive. To strengthen this reading, Ferrarin compares Hegel's positions in the *Encyclopedia* with the *Phenomenology of Spirit* and criticizes Brandom's useof Hegelian recognition in social terms and Pippin's confusion between recognition and the emergence of the social ethical dimension. Both share the view that self-consciousness is made possible through recognition, while Ferrarin argues the opposite. A very insightful commentary of the master-slave dialectic (in the *Phenomenology*) leads us i) to recognize the role of work and fear which are closely intertwined in the development of self-consciousness, ii) to understand why and how self-consciousness is what it is not because it is recognized as such (for this reason, page 67 is the most penetrating of the whole chapter).

If chapter one plays a preparatory role, chapter two brings the conclusions of the preceding pages to a new level of discussion concerning the nature of thinking beyond any human determination. The style of this chapter is remarkably different from the first since Ferrarin here reflects on the addressed issues to show how each element turns into another, e.g., how objective thought turns into subjective thought. This chapter contains a broad range of perspectives on its topic: i) objective thought; ii) the logical that enlivens the world; iii) the realization of the concept in the world. Regarding the first point, the author understands the 'objectivity' of objective thought as

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implying that the "I" of the subject must disappear to avoid altering the development of thinking itself, as it is freed from any particularity. Moreover, Ferrarin points out that the same objectivity refers to the internal movement of thought, as the force and instinct of not being moved (or thought) by anything beyond thought itself. The status of thought is not merely trans-individual but also trans-human, like Anaxagoras's concept of *nous*.The objective intelligibility of the world cannot be reduced to the activity of this or that subject. However, the author firmly warns us against the danger of realism, which would involve hypostatizing the absolute idea as the operational 'subject' of the whole development of thinking. Hegel's answer to such a danger lies in the affinity of all logical particular determinations. 'Objective thought' is a moment of thought which recognizes itself as the subject of its own movement; the transition from objective to subjective thought (which is not the subjectivism of the particular "I") is internal to the activity of thinking itself. This transition displays the pure logic of thought itself and the logical soul that all particular determinations share. In this activity of *Begreifen*, intended as the activity of the concept the result, this or that determined concept, is not external to its developmental process (the self-determination of thinking). The concept thus results from its own activity; from the activity of the concept itself. Therefore, the concept cannot be identified with a mental representation. The concept owns and determines us, rather than the other way around. However, with outstanding perspicuity Ferrarin clarifies how such dominion is not oppressive but instead the distinctive mark of the exercise of our own freedom.

We reach in this way the perspective of the logical as 'Being', of the Logic as the self-consciousness of thought. Once the speculative philosopher has released the living *logos* from its determinate concretions, the internal principle of all reality displays its pure form, namely that of reason as aiming at self-knowing. The logical is its own content or, more precisely, its form (the Logic) as the self-reflection of the content upon itself. This internal reflection is nothing but dialectic: the contradiction as the root of life, of the internal movement of all concepts. A living being, such as Thought, is marked by lacking something and therefore by having needs and desires. To this negative indigence, the positive answer of the needs of reason is what moves and enlivens reason itself. The compresence of these two moments, i.e., the simultaneity of the negative and the positive, is what Hegel calls the living contradiction. The logical thus takes the shape of a soul; the Logic is nothing but the form of self-knowledge. Once we reach the end of the logic (in the *Science of Logic*) we could therefore be tempted to take the final form of the Absolute Idea (intended as the abstract form of the concept insofar as it is freed from all particular determinations) as the ground of the whole movement. Ferrarin admonishes us against this move: such a hypostasis would amount to realism; a merely formal knowledge of the idea which does not consider its realizations. This lack of awareness moves us to subjective spirit, which is the third and last methodological perspective of the chapter which concerns the activity of thinking as having itself as its own object.

Per se, the Logic of thinking cannot be separated from its own realizations. Although it has to be understood before its determinations, the determinations are nevertheless essential. Ferrarin thus argues that there is no proper truth if truth does not correspond to its becoming real. Truth can be therefore intended as the being-known as true. The beginning and end of the process thus correspond to each other, although their respective meanings are not identical. The former is an abstraction, while the latter is the realized form of thought itself in its internal movement of self-production and self-specification. It is then clear why we must intend the concept as the true form that produces its own content, as an immanent cause and an embodied reason. Accordingly, the concept cannot be the starting point since it is always a kind of self-mediation. The real account of truth thus lies in the concept's self-realization, which also includes the falsity and particularity of its determinations.

Despite the anti-subjectivism (i.e. the refusal of the "I" as the thinking subject), the chapter moves to a seemingly paradoxical conclusion: the "I" is the authentic concrete universal. By claiming this, Ferrarin is not referring to a metaphysical subject but rather to the freed concept itself: the pure self-consciousness insofar as it understands itself as the subject of its own development and thereby taking the form of "I". This "I" is a form of unity; it is the form of the object as connected with the form of the subject, the transition to its own truth. In other words, the "I" is the way through which the idea adopts the form of self-consciousness. Continuing in this vein, chapter three is dedicated to the reification and the spontaneity of thought.

Here we immediately see how the movement of thought is marked by spontaneity and reification. The infinite, as a subject, thus assumes finite forms. This being-finite 'is' as a moment of

the infinite, but 'it is not' independently of the infinite. Both are comprehensible only in their reciprocal reference and cannot be separated. The self-alienation of thought in its own determinations precisely mirrors the dialectic between spontaneity and reification. The life of the concept consists of its own solidification through determination: its reification, meaning by this that the concept pulses into the object and not that the concept is thought as the object. For this reason, Ferrarin argues, thought is identical with its own exposition. At this point arises an important question: how is it possible to grasp the spontaneity of thought along with its passivity? The answer lies in Hegel's account of the self-realization of the concept (*Sichselbstentäusserung*). The fluidification of the finite concept is thus complementary to the solidification: all empirical determinations must be traced back to the self-determining concept. The concept must recognize its determinate and solid reifications as being temporary, being therefore capable to recognize itself through and within such determinations. Ferrarin is careful and precise in emphasizing this point: the being-other of its realizations is recognized by the concept as something not external nor alien. The passive side of the concept is necessary for the concept to take its spontaneity back. However, since thought is unconscious in its realizations, the task of speculative philosophy precisely consists in proving that in all concretions, thought produces its own being-real. Another question is here raised by Ferrarin (pp. 134-135): if the determinations are internal to the concept, how it is possible to say (as Hegel does in the *Encyclopedia*) that such determinations are also a product of the thinking subject? Before addressing Hegel's position, Ferrarin firmly criticizes both metaphysical realism according to which such productions are merely illusory and transcendentalism which claims that the 'Idea' itself is one of our productions. On the contrary, Hegel affirms that, although the 'Idea' is irreducible to its finite forms, it can (re-)cognize itself only through finite spirit. The work of thought is that of transforming the given into the concept (more precisely, into 'its own' concept), thereby allowing the concept to recognize itself in the finite. Hegel redefines the meaning of self-consciousness according to this movement. Self-consciousness is no immediate reference to a first-person point of view but rather a completely developed self-knowledge. It is knowledge in terms of relation between truth and certainty; subject and content. Such an account of knowledge thus involves a basic difference between the terms at issue, and for this reason this knowledge can be described only as a development and never as an identity. It is rather a form of unity, intended as the immanence of thought to its own determinations.

Chapter four begins by stating that the reversal of the ordinary subjective view of thought requires us to investigate the notion of representation. This notion has the same content as the concept, but a different form. In addition, the representation is speculatively weaker than the concept: the representation is not aware of its own status nor does it see the form it gives to its own content. Therefore, the task of speculative philosophy is to transform representations into thoughts. The first important thing Ferrarin notices is that a representation makes a kind of universal out of a sensible content. Every representation thus rises from an intuition which is internalized, so to say brought into the subject: a representation is always my representation, since it belongs to me. This means that the representation involves a negation of the 'outwardness' of being. This allows the author to spend some clear and sharp words on the importance of the *Erinnerung* and the freedom of the *erinnerte* from the givenness and the material presence of an object (pp. 145-147). This move from the outside is balanced by the opposite move of the concept which intuits itself into an external production that has been produced by the concept itself. The clearest example in this respect is language: names and words involve a relation of identity with their content, and the form of their production is essentially related to their content, to the being of the product. Spirit thus proceeds to its own external (in a different meaning than that of the 'outwardness' of the object of the representation) realization in the form of a second nature. Ferrarin shows how reason enters and permeates the same world it has been producing as if it were another nature, more precisely its own nature, that is its world. Now, if all our contents are chronologically first represented, then the object lies beyond the representation as an isolated item among other isolated items. The logic of representation is then aggregation. How should the concept turn this logic into a properly speculative (self-comprehending) one? Before answering, Ferrarin specifies that, in order to understand this change correctly, it is first necessary to understand that representation is already thought. But it is a merely formal thought, while speculative thought is meant to overcome the distinction between form and content. The difficulty is not replacing a form with another but rather to see that the concept takes its own form back as being inseparable from its formed content. Undoubtedly, in all objective concretions of the concept, the concept is restricted and

limited by the medium at issue. And this is true even of language. By facing this problem, Ferrarin makes his account of Hegel's idea of critique more explicit. The speculative proposition implies a critical re-definition of ordinary language. Hegel aims at dissolving the copulative structure of judgment, in which the "I" is responsible for the connection between subject and predicate. For Hegel, the real problem is not the correctness of 'our' knowledge but rather the truth of the content. In other words, the distinctive mark of the speculative proposition does not lie in an alternative theory of language but in both the demonstration of language's limits and in a radical, critical and continuous renovation of language: the real problem of speculative proposition is the truth as the subject, the self-development of the concept. The identity between content and form thus entails the move of the concept in taking itself back from its own representative manifestations. Hegel's idea of critique rests on the activities of i) questioning all certainties and ii) proving that the truth is the only subject in all those manifestations we could ever face as apparently being external to truth itself and therefore false.

The topic of the last chapter is sufficiently significant and complex to deserve a separate volume. Such a complete analysis of Hegel's understanding of Kant's philosophy is an *unicum* in the current scholarship on both thinkers. From a methodological point of view, Ferrarin clearly believes that any philosophical interpretation has to prove its own grounds and authenticity. In the comparison at issue, the author thus aims at proving how and why Hegel's understanding of Kant's philosophy is at times inaccurate and inadequate. Therefore, some of Hegel's readings, which are based on oversimplification of Kant's reflection, cannot be uncritically accepted. The same is valid for many contemporary interpreters (for example McDowell) who take Hegel's philosophy as a radicalization of Kant. Ferrarin's general premise is that although Hegel's comments on Kant are interesting and insightful, there are some crucial points which are deeply problematic.

The first issue concerns the Kantian "I" which Hegel transforms into the quintessential Category while for Kant the "I" represents the functional ground of all categories. Furthermore, Ferrarin criticizes Hegel's interpretive reduction of self-consciousness to the finite "I". Hegel here disregards the Paralogisms which are directed at refusing the identity between a function and a substance, and he does not grasp Kant's distinction between reason and the individual "I". Two parallel topics are important at this point: the view according to which the *Critique of Pure Reason* merely contains a theory of knowledge and the confusion between reason and the "I think". For Kant, reason works through the "I" but cannot be reduced to this "I". Hegel's interpretive premises seem to be the following: First, Kant's dichotomies are seen as unsolved oppositions, while Kant strived to show the connection between the different elements of the critique of reason (intuition and concept, sensibility and understanding, reason and understanding, natural causality and freedom, etc.). Second, the reduction of Kant's account of knowledge to the connection between intuition and concept (overlooking that this synthesis is not paradigmatic) which is a moment of the critique of reason and not its main achievement. Third, Hegel takes transcendental idealism to be a subjectivism, thus taking a perspective on the result of Kant's theory as the premise of his own interpretation of Kant. In general, Hegel clearly distinguished and keep separated all those elements that Kant distinguishes as well, though for the opposite purpose of understanding their original unity or, at least, legitimating their connection. Ferrarin, who is an expert on Kant too, shows that the very idea of a priori synthesis, as the guiding thread of the three *Critiques*, ultimately escapes Hegel. And Ferrarin argues that this hiatus is present in many contemporary readings of Kant. Accordingly, the debate on Kant's philosophy ought to have focused more on the meaning of the Architectonic (insofar as this refers to the self-development of reason) and the role of the ideas, as well as on a revision of the distinction between the constitutive role of the understanding and the regulative role of reason than on the role of the "I". Ferrarin (p. 208) argues convincingly, that a priori synthesis is Kant's formula to describe reason's causal power in the world. However, this also makes clear why Hegel's account of reason cannot be assimilated to Kant's. Hegel would never see reason as a faculty among others, but rather as the impulse to be at home in the world and govern it. For Hegel, reason has the internal necessity of recognizing its own work in all finite determinations, instead of always being understood as what it seems to be in this or that specific context. Lastly, if Kant's idea of reason is that of a normative causality, Hegel's reason is *causa sui*, the substance which turns into a subject. The latter is the subject of its own development. It is ceaselessly 'becoming' itself thereby implying the self-development of the passive substance.

The topics covered by this study are amongst the most crucial for understanding the general articulation of Hegel's philosophy. One of Ferrarin's most remarkable merits is that of having developed a very specific analysis of several particular issues without ever losing the general movement towards the *demonstrandum*. The result is a dense but vibrant and stimulating book which tries, as Hegel himself meant to do, to show how a healthy skepticism can lead us towards the true meaning of an issue beyond all comfortable certainties. Ferrarin's overall point is both thematic and methodological. This is evident in all critics of some instrumental readings of Hegel as well as in Hegel's own interpretation of Kant. Such an attitude proves how seriously the author takes Hegel's idea of critique. Moreover, it proves that it is both possible and necessary to learn also from the mistakes and oversights of other interpreters (including Hegel) apart from the great achievements of the giants of our philosophical tradition. This book does not merely illuminate many important elements of Kant and Hegel's philosophy and establish a dialogue between two authors who are often understood as incompatible; it is also able to prove the efficiency of its own method. This is a book which does not only teach philosophy, but also how to philosophize. In sum, this book deserves the attention of anyone interested in understanding both Hegel, Kant and their contemporary interpreters.

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