

Ermylos Plevrakis (hrsg.),  
**Hegels Philosophie der Realität**  
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Benedetta Gori

The volume *Hegels Philosophie der Realität* aims to explore the problematic concept of reality within Hegel's system. As Plevrakis pertinently writes in the introduction to the work, Hegel's uniqueness on this topic lies in the fact that the German philosopher does not devote a specific chapter of the *Enz* or of the *PhG* to the investigation of the concept of reality alone (unlike other terms such as objectivity, nature, spirit, being, etc.). In the *WdL* – specifically in subsection *b. Quality*, of the first subsection *A. Being Determinate as Such*, within *Being Determinate* in the *Logic of Being* – Hegel seems rather to assign the concept of reality a subordinate position within the logical structure, mentioning it *en passant*, as a moment contained within the concept of quality and not as an end in itself (cf. Plevrakis 2024). Thus, although Hegel mentions reality in various contexts (e.g., in the systematic premises of the *Enz* § 6 or in the *PhR*, where he famously writes that what is real is rational, as Siani in his article pertinently points out (cf. Siani 2024)), it is nevertheless true that his philosophy of reality does not seem to receive a systematic elaboration, which leads to a problematic polysemy of the term “reality”.

The merit of the volume edited by Plevrakis is therefore that of shedding light on the complex relationship between realism and idealism in Hegelian philosophy, without falling into the “vulgate” that Hegelian idealism is irreparably disconnected from reality, and of showing how Hegel transcends the dichotomies of *Logic/Realphilosophie*, idealism/realism, and subjective/objective through a reason that forms and recognizes itself within reality. In particular, although attention to the topic of reality is not actually something new (consider, for instance, cf. Bouton 2018; cf. Heidemann 2018; cf. Illetterati 2007; cf. Wirsing 2021; cf. Pippin 2018; cf. Plevrakis 2020, and how well-known the nexus between actuality and rationality has become), the distinctive feature of the volume lies primarily in its ability to provide, thanks to the plurality of authors and their specific interests, a broad perspective on the Hegelian corpus and the internal tensions or references within it, always keep-

ing a historical-philosophical cogency. In this plurality of contributions, the common thread uniting them is first of all the conviction that Concept and reality must constitute a unity (a fully reasonable belief). However, when it comes to addressing how this unity is realized, the scholars' perspectives diverge and, perhaps, it is precisely this open question that continues to sustain the interest and relevance of Hegelian philosophy. A second relevant point that emerges from all the essays is the belief that a philosophy of reality can indeed be reconstructed in Hegel – both exegetically and systematically – as the comparison between different parts of the Hegelian corpus aptly shows. However, given the plurality of methods adopted by the contributors, the question of how to achieve this aim perhaps remains open.

The editor divides the contributions into two main groups: if the first addresses the issue of reality in Hegel from a general perspective, with articles focusing particularly on the tensions inherent in the *WdL* and Hegel's transcendence of the realism/idealism dualism, the second group focuses mainly on particular aspects of this issue. In the first part, the thematic continuity is particularly strong and despite the complexity of the topics addressed, all the essays are very clear and straightforward. However, among these essays (and particularly in that of Elena Ficara, who explicitly connects scholastic philosophy with Hegelian logic) there may be a lack of reflection on the problematic nature of Hegel's use of the ontological proof in discussions of the continuity between subjectivity and objectivity in the *Logic of the Concept*, which is, nevertheless, a crucial moment in the transition from the Concept to the Idea and thus to reality. Moving on to the second part, it is especially here that we find the comparison of Hegel's view with those of other philosophers, as well as important considerations on the continuity and discontinuity between nature (understood as the Earth, that is as the foundation of life, or as the body in the *Anthropology*) and spirit, emotions and reflection, etc. It is noteworthy that the succession of the contributions in this second part reflects the continuity between their different themes. Let us now consider each of the essays separately and discuss the positions adopted by the authors.

*A.F. Koch.* Koch's main thesis is that, while for Kant, categories (such as reality) are pure concepts devoid of autonomous assertive force, for Hegel, logical determinations are full claims to truth. Hegelian logic, therefore, does not merely consist of applicable predicates but connects thought and reality. To justify this position, Koch follows the autonomous-development of concepts in the logical path, where thought acquires concreteness, and the duality of reality and ideality is overcome in autonomy. It is at the end of this path that the Idea as totality freely projects itself outward, manifesting as Nature. Consequently, Nature is not an external addition but rather an extension of a logical

development and thus, for Koch, extralogical reality is not separate from logical reality but is instead a concrete manifestation of it in the spatio-temporal domain. This also explains why the speculative is capable of both constituting and grasping the profound unity among Idea, nature, and spirit.

*D. H. Heidemann.* The question driving Heidemann's essay is whether, in Hegelian philosophy, it is possible to identify a reality that transcends the limits of the conceivable. He approaches this issue by first distinguishing between empirical reality and logical reality, and then providing a historical analysis of the relationship between realism and idealism in 18th- and 19th-century philosophical debates, which serve as a foundation for Hegel's reflection. In the second part of the text, Heidemann examines Hegel's context directly, introducing a distinction between a reality devoid of concept (merely empirical reality lacking conceptual determinations) and a concept devoid of reality, which is initially understood as a mere determination of thought to which empirical reality is added only subsequently. In both cases, the critique lies in Hegel's belief that reality should not be an external datum that thought merely reflects but rather the product of conceptual thought itself, so that concept and reality form a unity, and reality is such insofar as it is conceived.

*F. Orsini.* Orsini's text examines Hegel's conception of reality with reference to the *Science of Logic*, aiming to show that thought is the source of the true structure of all possible realities, whether natural or spiritual, and he does so by exploring five fundamental concepts, with speculative idealism being the most significant. In fact this concept affirms that the essential structures of being are identical to the essential structures of thinking, where, "structure" denotes the activity of self-explication and self-movement of the concept. At the same time, thought is not an external principle explaining being but is instead an internal ontological and epistemological principle of reality itself. This leads Orsini to propose a "duality without dualism", implying the absence of an ontological separation between nature and spirit. Instead, there exists a processual tension that reveals reality as nothing other than the progressive unfolding of the Absolute Idea through the mediation and self-transformation of nature and spirit.

*C. Krijnen.* In addressing the reality of the Absolute, the article begins by preliminarily defining the terms "reality" and "Absolute" and discussing the contemporary debate between realism and skepticism. Krijnen sees Hegel as offering a relevant response to this issue, one capable of justifying objective knowledge, since, in Hegel, thought is regarded as the principle of objectivity. The result is that while there may be a reality independent of thought, it finds its foundation and validity only within thought. Regarding the Absolute, Krijnen raises the question of whether it can be known. Beyond external critiques

(such as skepticism's hesitations), the issue is resolved by Hegel through a process of thought's self-determination and evolution to the autonomy of the Idea. The reality of the Absolute, therefore, is the result of an immanent deduction within and of reason, which reveals itself not as a static reality but as a dynamic principle inherent in all objectivity and possible reality. Thus, the Absolute Idea expands into a system of conceptual determinations that permeate every aspect of reality, including its concrete manifestations in nature and spirit.

*E. Ficara.* Ficara analyzes Hegel's interpretation of the medieval controversy between realists and nominalists in a logical context. This analysis is particularly interesting given Hegel's generally critical stance toward Scholastic philosophy, which he often dismissed as hyper-intellectualistic and grotesquely reducing spiritual content to empirical determinations. However, this critique does not apply to the controversy between realists (who believe in the existence of universals independently of subjective thought) and nominalists (who claim that only individuals have reality). In this debate, Hegel adopts a mediating position. The solution involves immanent negation—a dialectical process that allows the abstract universal to become concrete and real through its relation to the individual. For Hegel, the universal exists only if it is capable of expressing and incorporating the individual, such that truth ultimately resides in the interaction between realism and nominalism.

*S. Schüz.* In Schüz's article, we officially enter the second part of the volume. Schüz explores the concept of "absolute knowing" as it appears at the end of the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, questioning what conception of reality it reveals. In this context, Schüz compares two interpretations to highlight the one-sidedness of both: while Pippin's approach fails to adequately integrate the objectivity of the external world with the structures of thought and ends being overly idealistic, Houlgate's approach errs in the opposite direction and is overly realistic. Schüz emphasizes the need for a middle ground between the two positions: the absolute knowing is neither a spontaneous act imposing content nor a passive reception of objective content, but rather the self-generation and self-comprehension of the concept. It is a dynamic process uniting activity and passivity through a content that understands itself. Within the context of the *PhG*, the self-comprehension of the concept at the stage of absolute knowing is the unification of the realistic and idealistic attitudes toward the objective.

*L. Heckerroth.* Heckerroth's article develops a comparison between Hegel's and Leibniz's perception of reality and negation, so that while for Leibniz, reality consists of positive, affirmative content devoid of contradictions, represented by pure perfections, for Hegel, reality begins with affirmation free of negation but evolves into a more complex totality through the dialectical process. This is why Hegel critiques this reduction of perfections to pure positivity as

overly abstract, rendering them incompatible with specific determinations. As a result, negation takes on a positive meaning in Hegel's system: it is not merely the "absence of fullness" but a fundamental component in the construction of reality, it is a dynamic process through which reality achieves its own perfection. Thus, the categories of reality and negation evolve into a vision of reality as a dialectical totality, where every being is defined in relation to its opposite.

*R. Aragüés.* Aragüés' article wants to point out that Hegel does not develop a philosophy of reality as something separated from logic, but instead his aim is to articulate the Absolute Idea through logic, nature and spirit. From this, Aragüés draws the conclusion that Hegel's philosophy can be understood through the lens of idealism, as thought appears to be the source of truth. In this context the relationship between Idea and reality in Hegel develops as a process of self-consciousness where the Absolute Idea recognizes itself in reality. Therefore, even if the Idea constitutes ultimate truth, it must continuously confront with otherness to fully recognize itself.

*R. Dunphy.* Dunphy tackles the controversial topic of the distinction between a priori and a posteriori knowledge in Hegel's philosophy, particularly within the *Realphilosophie*. Against interpretations that emphasize either a purely a priori metaphysics or a total rejection of the distinction in Hegel's thought, Dunphy argues that Hegel retains a version of this distinction. Hegel's metaphysical claims, for instance in the *Philosophy of Nature*, integrate empirical results from the natural sciences with fundamental *a priori* categories developed in the *WdL*. This allows Hegel to construct a metaphysics of nature and spirit that interprets empirical data within a predefined conceptual framework.

*L. Illetterati.* Illetterati's article addresses the question of reality through the lens of recent debates on whether Hegelian philosophy can be understood as a form of naturalism. So, after examining various forms of naturalism, distinguishing between ontological and epistemological naturalism, Illetterati focuses on the relationship between nature and spirit. While nature, characterized by externality, represents a rupture of the Idea, marked by the separation of concept and reality, spirit generally signifies the recovery of the unity of concept and objectivity. At this point Illetterati argues that while spirit is the truth of nature, the externality that characterizes nature does not entirely vanish and the fundamental difference lies in the fact that, while in nature externality dominates, in spirit it is subordinated to the concept, though still present. Thus, externality, as a central concept of nature, characterizes all reality, including spirit. This leads to a form of naturalism that is neither ontological nor epistemological but rather a non-naturalistic vision of nature.

*C. Martin.* Referencing thermodynamics, Martin examines the essential connection between spirit and planet Earth. What Martin explores is the spirit as

the activity of setting and realizing subjective goals in the world, which presupposes an organism with an internal purposive organization and which, in turn, is only possible on a planet understood as a solid body with an atmosphere supporting the necessary assimilative processes. Although rational life and spirit are bound to Earth (which is not itself a rational entity), this does not mean that spirit is confined to natural conditions. On the contrary, spirit can transform these conditions by attributing new cultural meanings. So, for Martin, spirit cannot exist without a physical environment and the embodied processes occurring on it, even if it does not reduce spirit to specific spatial or temporal coordinates.

*A. de Laurentiis.* De Laurentiis' essay examines the soul (*Seele*), as conceived by Hegel, with particular focus on his treatment in the *Anthropology*. The soul, for De Laurentiis, is the link between the natural and the emergence of spirit and it is an integral part of the process of the Idea's realization. The article explores the notion of "natural spirit", an ontological reality where soul and corporeality coexist as distinct moments of a larger unity. The soul is never entirely separate from the body but develops in constant relation to it, from passive sensation to active sentience and, ultimately, to feeling. The essay finally shows, however, that for Hegel the journey from the inorganic to the living to spirit is not simply a matter of physical development but a teleological unfolding whereby nature sublimates its own exteriority in order to actualize spirit as the ultimate truth of nature itself.

*A.L. Siani.* Siani's article points out that the common interpretation of Hegelianism as a rigidly rational (in the negative, "abstract" sense) doctrine that denies the emotional dimension of the human reality leads to an incomplete understanding of the philosopher. A careful reading of Hegel's texts shows that even though he is critical of the overestimation of the emotional factor as an exclusive basis of knowledge and action, he does not deny its essential part within his philosophical system. For Siani, in Hegel, the relation of emotions and thought involves a positive and continuous interaction between the two elements at play, giving rise to a constant reflection on the meaning of experience. For Hegel, this ongoing active process of reflection and interpretation, integrating emotions and thought in an enriching dialectical dynamic, represents the very essence of being human. Thus, emotions, although they are not the ultimate end for Hegel, are still an indispensable dimension of human existence, requiring mediation through concepts. This also marks a difference from Dewey, for whom emotions are indeed an integrated dimension of reality (rather than private mental states) but do not require reflective distancing to be comprehended and objectified.

*J. W. Lücke.* Lücke investigates the relationship between truth and reality in Hegelian philosophy, focusing on what it means for something to be "real"



or “objective”. After discussing the influence of readings of Hegel flattened by post-Kantianism and McDowell’s alternative, which seems unable to transcend subjective idealism, Lücke suggests resolving the impasse on Hegelian truth by referring to Aristotle. According to Lücke, Hegel draws on Aristotle’s intuition of the identity between thought and object, transposing it into the domain of the manifestation of the concrete universal known by reason. In short, Hegel’s “certainty of reason” (*Vernunftgewissheit*) reflects reason’s ability to recognize itself—a recursive, self-reflective structure—within things. With this rational certainty, according to Lücke, Hegelian philosophy remains relevant in contrast to postmodernism because the necessary conceptual structure of things and their relationships makes them not only knowable but also irreducible to opinion, grounding judgment in a robust concept of truth.

*E. Plevrakis.* Plevrakis, in an essay offering a critical commentary on § 553 of the *Philosophy of Spirit*, analyzes the transition from the knowledge of spirit in world history to that of the Absolute Idea, comparing the reality of absolute spirit with the broader reality of reason. His thesis is that spirit constitutes the context in which reason, conceived as knowledge of the Absolute Idea, partially realizes itself. Of particular interest is the implication Plevrakis draws from the fact that absolute spirit is embodied in real subjects, whose capacity to comprehend reason contributes to the realization of reality itself. He argues that for this reason, absolute spirit is never fully realized but represents an ongoing process—a dynamism reflected in the very nature of Hegelian philosophy, which cannot be equated with the Absolute Idea but remains open to change in light of new conditions and discoveries. As § 553 makes clear, absolute spirit is a continuous activity, something that constantly actualizes itself by addressing new determinations arising from historical conditions, revealing itself not as an abstract concept but as a concrete and dynamic manifestation of reason.

To conclude, I would say that the volume is particularly interesting in the fact that it shows different essays all gravitating around the same open question, namely: how Hegel reconciles the Concept with reality? Another issue of particular interest is the one expressed by Plevrakis, who in contrast to the common belief of Hegel being the ultimate interpreter of absolute spirit, questions whether this absolute spirit can ever be fully realized, or whether it should be understood as a constant and ongoing process in a more radical sense. All these elements make the text truly formative not only for professors and researchers who have a deep understanding of Hegel’s philosophy and want to challenge their beliefs on the topic, but also for bachelors and master students who are approaching the author for the first time and who, precisely because of the insistent return to the same question from different perspectives, can learn much out of it.