

Luis Guzmán, *Relating Hegel's Science of Logic to Contemporary Philosophy: Themes and Resonances*, Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke (Hampshire, UK) 2015, pp. IX, 212, € 83,19, ISBN 9781349497959

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Luis Guzmán's book is aimed at offering a non-metaphysical reading, which could overcome the difficulties encountered by similar non-metaphysical interpretations offered by McDowell and Brandom, with reference to the ongoing debate on the critique of the myth of the given. In this debate various forms "realism" and/or "skepticism" – claiming that objectivity comes from outside the mind, and therefore concentrating on the epistemological problem of how it is possible for the mind to properly represent objectivity – have been opposed to just as many versions of "coherentism" – claiming instead that all objectivity is produced from within thought, or from within language. While realists fear that coherentist positions would lead to relativism and subjectivism, coherentists point to the paradox of trying to "bridge the gap" between two elements (mind and world) that are defined essentially by their mutual exclusion.

McDowell and Brandom, although they offer very different interpretations, have both attempted to read Hegel as a model of coherentism.

Guzmán suggestion is that Brandom's and McDowell's interpretations of Hegel still leave his philosophy open to the common criticism against coherentism, whereas Hegel would have overcome the very opposition of coherentism and realism, offering a conception of objectivity which is at the same time conceptual, and "stubbornly" opposed to the subject.

The core of this understanding of objectivity would lie, according to Guzmán, in Hegel's non-metaphysical concept of the Absolute.

Hegel's Absolute is presented as "A posit that always exceeds all inquiry" (p.2), and yet one which needs the practice of never-ending inquiry of itself just to be posited. Guzmán immediately equals the "absolute" to truth – as Hegel also does in the "Idea" section of the *Science of Logic* – so that, according to his reading, truth not only allows error, but is actually constituted and posited by the experience of error itself, as a reflection of it.

Another fundamental aspect of Hegel's understanding of the Absolute is its never-ending processual character, which Guzmán reads as meaning that truth can never be fully acquired, that there is no chance of "getting it right" in an absolute, definitive, manner: all beliefs will sooner or later be falsified, and that is exactly what posits and maintains truth as such.

This understanding of truth presupposes a form of "hardness" of objectivity, which can never be fully and thoroughly grasped, and which therefore cannot be subjectivist, insofar as it actually transcends all subjective apprehensions of it. On the other hand, though, this definition of truth also implies according to Guzmán that objectivity is defined nowhere else but in the mind's attempt to define it, and, therefore, that it is conceptual.

Each one of the 5 chapters of the book is dedicated to one aspect of the above-mentioned understanding of truth: the notion of "object" presented in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, where we have the minimal definition of objectivity as conceptual; Hegel's understanding of infinity in relation to the "ought" in the Doctrine of Being, with which the never-ending and processual structure of truth is first presented; Hegel's notion of *Wirklichkeit*, in which the latter structure is further specified as "absolute necessity"; Hegel's idea of "syllogism", which reveals that the conceptual character of objectivity implies inter-subjectivity; and finally Hegel's notion of the Idea, which reveals that the non-full-correspondence of objectivity to its individual subjective apprehensions is not only a characteristic of man's experience of truth, but also a necessity for the idea of truth in general.

The first chapter presents a detailed analysis of the last paragraphs of the Introduction to the *Phenomenology of Spirit*. Here, Guzmán introduces his understanding of Hegel's Absolute, through a comparison between Hegel's notion of experience and Davidson's critique of "the third dogma of empiricism" in "On the Very Idea of a Conceptual Scheme".

Guzmán criticizes Davidson's suggestion of discarding the notions of scheme and of content (as well as that of their opposition) altogether, since this would engender an inevitable relativist drift. Guzmán's analysis of the Introduction to the *Phenomenology* sets to prove that Hegel's notion of truth, even though it presupposes a form of conceptual realism which is very similar to Davidson's, avoids the production of such a "frictionless spinning in a void" (p.22).

Just as Davidson, Hegel insists on the necessity of determining the criterion of truth from within thought, and he envisages the need for a general presupposition of truth in order to detect mistakes and falsity in the practice of knowledge (that is, in order to be able to define something as mistaken or false, I need to have a greater context of true beliefs that I can refer to).

What follows in the "Introduction" is, according to Guzmán, an analysis of the structure through which truth-claims are produced, which itself eventually shows that none of the ever-possible truth-claims could express truth as whole. Guzmán explains this aspect by concentrating on Hegel's use of the dative *an ihm* to express the object "in itself", and Hegel's use of *von* to designate instead the object "for consciousness". Hegel's stylistic choice would be intended to emphasize the fact that an object can appear *to* (*an ihm*) consciousness, that is as independent, in front of, and opposite from it (in Hegel's use, "in itself"), only through the knowledge consciousness can have *of it* (*von*). In other words, only as a posit of its various predicates can an object appear as independent of these very predicates, as the subject that "has" them. This very connection is what triggers the position of a new object (in itself/*an ihm*) whenever the falsification of a concept for consciousness (*von*) occurs. On this reading, then, objects of knowledge, as well as truth in general, are "shadows" projected by our truth-claims: they seem independent from them, but they depend on them just to appear as such.

This means that the opposition of objects to concepts needs to be continuously posed in order to have that very notion of truth, which can never be expressed once and for all. If we equate, as Guzmán does, Hegel's notions of concept and object to Davidson's notions of scheme and content respectively, it could also be said: the dualism between scheme and content can and must not be overcome, but rather needs to be continuously posited.

The second chapter is dedicated to Hegel's notion of infinity and contains an analysis of the "Determinate Being" section in the *Science of Logic* and a confrontation with Derrida's renowned criticism of the notion of "true infinite".

The main thesis is that the opposition between the finite and the infinite is maintained and not sublated (as Derrida would claim) in the true infinite.

Read as the opposition between the ideal of a good action and one individual human act, the opposition of finite and infinite is considered by Guzmán as the counterpart of the concept/object distinction presented in the Introduction to the *Phenomenology*: just as the object in itself, the something exceeds its opposition to the other, but it is only posited in its opposition to it. This tension is better expressed in the opposition of constitution and destination: it is a tension between the “ideal” identity of oneself, and one’s life as a series of acts that all tend, but never exhaust, the strive towards that ideal. Yet only through the incompleteness of these acts can that ideal be posited. This realization would be the basis of the passage from bad infinity to true infinity: the latter is one with the finite, in the sense that it knows that only through its finitude it is posed as infinite. In true infinity, the finite realizes the infinite through the very fact that it constantly fails to realize it.

The third chapter focuses on Hegel’s notion of necessity through an analysis of the “*Wirklichkeit*” chapter in the *Science of Logic*, in comparison with Willard van Orman Quine’s critique of meaning invariance in “Two Dogmas of Empiricism”.

Through the critique of analyticity and reductionism Quine impeded the definition of any meaning with reference to invariant referents, thereby introducing a historical, experience-based notion of meaning (holistically defined with relation to the whole of “science” of which it is a part). According to Guzmán, Hegel is going in a very similar direction in the “*Wirklichkeit*” chapter, which he reads as the definition of the “conceptual strategy” (p.93) through which any definition of “what is” is produced. He also reads it as culminating in a definition of necessity as retrospective recollection of the contingent causes and conditions of a given actual. Guzmán mixes Hegel’s notion of real necessity and absolute necessity: what is necessary has no power of determination on its conditions and causes, which it reassesses as parts of its necessity only from the standpoint of its accomplishment, and for this very reason necessity is a form, which is entirely indifferent to its content. Just as Quine’s meaning, Hegelian necessity can vary over time, depending on the “conditions” at hand – even though this variation is in its specific content indifferent to necessity, which remains the same in the never-ending movement of its historical determination.

Guzmán reads formal actuality as outlining, although abstractly, the key features of Hegel's notion of necessity: first, necessity expresses the mediated character of actuality, that is, the fact that what is actual cannot be considered as a mere and isolated given, but has to be understood in relation with its "possibility" (that is, its conditions). Second, all determinations of necessity are, according to Hegel, inescapably contingent, because they refer to conditions of actualization, which could have been different. These aspects are clarified in real and absolute necessity. In real necessity possibility takes the concrete form of retrospectively traceable conditions of a given actual, and actuality is said to coincide with necessity: given that the present actual is only so with relation to the conditions that define it, it is impossible that it could have been otherwise.

Absolute necessity will clarify the peculiarity of the process of which Hegelian necessity consists, and it will also lift the "relativity" of real necessity. Real actuality is relative because it is mediated through conditions, which are immediate themselves. As absolute necessity, actuality is freed from the dependence on the given character of its conditions, because in absolute necessity actuality is defined as the process of mediating itself, independent from the specific conditions on which it is mediated. What is necessary is a process of "becoming itself" through conditions, whose content can change what the actual at hand specifically becomes, but not the fact that it becomes itself. Guzmán reads the identity of form and content in absolute necessity as the indifference of content in its relation to form: conditions do not affect (absolute) actuality formally, because (absolute) actuality is determined only with reference to the process of "becoming-itself" of the actual. Content-wise, though, the specific character of conditions indeed affects actuality: even though it will always be necessary (that is, mediated with itself in its having become itself), actuality could still have been different, had it known different conditions. The fourth chapter is dedicated to the "Syllogism" chapter in the *Science of Logic*, which Guzmán reads in parallel to the *Wirklichkeit* section: the three forms of syllogism (of being, of reflection, of necessity) are read as further elaborations of the three types of necessity (formal, real, absolute), which were outlined in the previous chapter. More specifically, Guzmán traces in hypothetical syllogism (If A, then B; A; then B) the structure of absolute necessity: B is retrospectively posed

as the condition of A, given the existence of A. Disjunctive syllogism (which he reads, forcing the Hegelian structure, If A, then B; A and not C, D, E; then B) is only meant to highlight the “indifference” and “contingency” of the specific content of absolute necessity.

This aspect is put in the context of an assumption of Brandom’s understanding of syllogism. Since syllogism immediately passes into objectivity, syllogism is the structure through which objectivity is produced, and it is the testimony that not only objectivity is produced by subjectivity (as it is part of the Subjectivity section), but also that it is not produced in an immediate interaction of the individual subject with the world (as the Syllogism chapter is the successor of the Judgement chapter). The threefold structure of syllogism allows for a third actor in the constitution of objectivity, mediating the interaction of the subject making a truth-claim and the object this truth-claim refers to. This third actor is intersubjective and historical and represents something in the middle between Brandomian “tradition” and McDowellian “second nature”: it is the reservoir of all retrospectively-traced conditions for the definition of an object in a truth-claim. The inevitable reference to this reservoir in the production of a truth-claim, makes it contingent and falsifiable in the long run.

The fifth chapter is dedicated to the Idea section, in which the Absolute is seen as the “posit” of the never-ending process through which “second nature”, or objectivity, is constituted in constant opposition to the knowing subject. The very idea of objectivity in general, or truth, is only possible in the context of a necessarily never-ending quest for truth and objectivity. Had he insisted more on this element, McDowell could have made more explicit in what way second nature is not a constructivist notion.

Even though it clearly takes a way of reading Hegel’s philosophy, which is highly controversial, Guzmán’s book is insightful and compelling. It considers many “correspondences” between Hegel’s philosophy and contemporary analytic philosophy, which are often made as suggestions, but which are very seldom explored in detail, and he actually takes on the burden of developing them in pieces of systematic interpretation of the *Science of Logic*.

Guzmán’s book also has the merit, just as the work of many recent critics (such as Rocío Zambrana, Karin de Boer and

Angelica Nuzzo, to name a few), of insisting on the enormous role that “division” and “judgment” play in Hegel’s understanding of reality and truth. Although maybe less intentionally, Guzmán’s reading also raises the question of the relationship between the Idea and temporality and/or historicity, a topic of growing interest in Hegelian scholarship and crucial for the understanding of Hegel’s philosophy itself.

Yet some elements of Guzmán’s book remain ambiguous, probably also due to its brevity. Given the level of detail of Guzmán’s analysis, it would only be fair to consider the specific arguments, but since there’s no room to do that here, I will limit myself to two general remarks, on points that I think are fundamental.

First of all, an exegetical observation: Guzmán understands *Wirklichkeit* in terms of absolute necessity, insisting that the determination of objectivity is characterized by a peculiar indifference of content in relation to form. This means that the definition of objectivity only occurs in a retrospective definition of a present actual, so that for every changing actual we have reconfigured conditions. The specific content of the one individual process is indifferent to objectivity, or truth itself, which is instead posited in every movement of retrospective tracing of conditions, no matter the actual at hand. This notion remains crucial in Guzmán’s reading of syllogism and the Idea. I think this reading of *Wirklichkeit* is responsible for some ambiguities in the book. To name but a few, it is unclear to me how the indifference of specific truth-claims, with comparison to truth as the unchanging reflection of the process of coming up with “true-but-ultimately-untrue” claims, could be a good advocate for the “hardness” of objectivity. Further, I am afraid that on this reading it would be hard to introduce the possibility for progress – and by that I do not mean the necessity that this occurs in a linear fashion, or at all, but only the possibility for it to occur – in history and in the Absolute spirit (including philosophy). If the specific determinations of different historical “movements of absolute necessity” are indifferent, then all forms of right and of established social order, for example, should be considered equally “true”, and ultimately equivalent. History would be nothing but the eternal recurrence of the same, in a circularity that Hegel, if to anything, only attributed to natural time as distinguished from historical time.

I think that a consideration of the *Wirklichkeit* section as whole, and not only of the *Wirklichkeit* chapter, could have greatly helped to avoid these misunderstandings. In fact, it is clear in Hegel's discussion of the absolute relationship, immediately following absolute necessity, that absolute necessity still fosters an opposition of form and content, which has to be overcome. The aim of the reciprocal relationship in particular is exactly one of understanding the importance of the determination of content for the constitution of form: if the determination of content is indifferent to form, then it is presupposed, content is considered determined by "something other" than form, and in this way form is still limited by this presupposition. In Guzmán's terms, this would mean that truth nevertheless presupposes a factor of "determination" of its specific contents: temporality, and a form of "contingency" of "material" conditions which have nothing to do with thought, intersubjectivity and/or truth-claims.

Interestingly enough, Hegel explains how "absolute necessity" is the structure through which the finite experiences necessity; that Guzmán insists on this structure reveals his tendency of "reducing" the speculative plane to the phenomenological plane, identifying thought as the subjectivity of substance, the Concept, with the phenomenological representation of consciousness.

Another aspect that is unclear is Guzmán's overcoming of the scheme/content dualism. The epistemological side of the problem is solved in the definition of an "inner" hardness of objectivity with relation to subjectivity, so that it is impossible for the concept to grasp objectivity in a sort of "intellectual intuition", and so that there could be no direct "creation" of objectivity by the individual mind. Yet the metaphysical, or ontological side of the problem – which in my opinion Davidson's critique of the third dogma brings out clearer than Sellars' critique of the myth of the given – is left dangling: Guzmán's Hegel still would be unable to answer the skeptic's question as to whether our construction of objectivity is only coming from thought, or if it is produced with relation to some external "input". If Guzmán is willing to attribute to Hegel, as Brandom and Pippin recently did, the quasi-Rortian claim that the relation of objectivity with its input is indifferent for the constitution of objectivity, as long as this can be accounted for from within the "scheme", he should have stated this more explicitly. This claim would in my opinion be attuned to his

concentration on “absolute necessity”, and on his “phenomenological reduction” of the Logic’s argument.

Finally, I think the book could have benefited from a more thorough confrontation with Davidson, and with his later production especially, where his attempt at defining truth through triangulation could have brought significant insights to Guzmán’s reading.