

Simon Lumsden. *Self-consciousness and the Critique of the Subject: Hegel, Heidegger, and the Poststructuralists*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2014, xviii+265

Is Hegel the philosopher who blocks the path to a new future for philosophy after Kant, or does he open that path? Simon Lumsden argues in this intriguing book that Hegel, far from being the arch metaphysician of presence that Heidegger, Derrida, and Deleuze take him to be, in fact opens a way past the dualities of Kant toward a better future for philosophy.

Lumsden analyzes how Hegel responds to the duality of intuition/concept in Kant, then argues that Heidegger, Derrida, and Deleuze miss Hegel's innovative treatment, and so read him as akin to Descartes or Fichte. Lumsden contends that Hegel is not the culmination of the metaphysics of presence, but lies closer to Heidegger and Derrida, though they do not coincide. Indeed, Lumsden suggests that those thinkers themselves may fail to deal adequately with the intuition/concept duality. His focus on this key issue gives the book a solid thematic core that is well argued, if controversial, but this focus also makes it difficult for a relatively short book to support the far reaching conclusions he draws from his analysis. In what follows I first discuss Lumsden's reading of Hegel and then his treatment of the other thinkers.

According to Lumsden, the empiricists distinguished between passively received non-conceptual content and active structuring by concepts in judgment. Kant's resolution of this duality saddled thought with the task of safeguarding its objectivity yet relating to a thing-in-itself that forever escapes. Does Kant's solution result in a science of necessary structures for experience, as Kant thought, or to skepticism or subjective idealism, as his critics claimed? Lumsden brings his topic into focus through Kant's distinction, Schulze and Reinhold's critique of Kant's solution, Fichte's response to them, and Hegel's subsequent criticism of Fichte.

For Lumsden Fichte made the key move toward overcoming the duality, answering Reinhold by working to “establish that knowledge was not given its contents by a passively conceived faculty of sensibility, but that the subject was active in the determination of *the intuitive component* of knowledge” (40 - my emphasis). That is, there is no passive given to be worked over by concepts. “The possibility of knowledge is grounded in an active subject whose determinations could not be explained by appeal to a given” (40). Intuition is part of a self-determining already conceptual totality. Lumsden emphasizes Fichte’s “insight into the limitations of the reflective model of self-consciousness” (79) and praises Dieter Henrich’s pioneering work, while arguing that Fichte fails to overcome the duality because the extra-conceptual “check” (*Anstoß*) that brings the ego finitude means that knowledge is still tied to a mysterious other.

Lumsden sees Hegel picking up Fichte’s self-determining totality but refining it so that there is no other to spirit. Yet this does not mean that spirit is a self-coincident entity gathering all into a metaphysic of self-presence. “The way in which Hegel responds...does not mean he has created an expanded self=identical subject whose exclusive relation to itself is self-knowledge” (109).

Hegel keeps intuitive content, but does not allow it to be purely received or impervious to discursive thought. Sensory experience “is not simply given or passive; [it] involves basic discriminations that are judgmental and not simply receptive” (95). There is no act of judging using categories as tools to work over a given object; the judgment and its object both emerge together and the categories unify both. The object is not separable from its conception, since the unity of the object comes from the thought of it. “The content of experience is not separable from the conditions and categories that render those objects meaningful. The truth of objects is the concept of them, and those concepts cannot be seen as being purely subjective or as having a transcendental or naturalistic origin” (165). All we have is a self-correcting judging activity.

For Lumsden, Hegel set out to show that “rather than the object world standing over and against the conscious subject, the content of experience is not separable from the conditions and categories that allow the experience of objects” (88). It is the *Phenomenology of Spirit* that eliminates the idea that the subject is able to distinguish itself from the objects of its experience. Lumsden contends that as each shape of consciousness in the series collapses, an increasingly complex net of determining relations is expressed (196). The subject realizes its dependence on mutual recognition, and learns that recognition is achieved through social structures the ego does not itself create. In the reason and religion sections it learns of its dependence on nature beyond itself. This is not absorbing objects into the subject; it converts the unified Cartesian self-consciousness into an awareness of the subject’s dependence on conditions not under its control. “Hegel’s model of self-relation is mediated through the conditions or a discursive horizon that is external to the subject” (68).

Objects are not separable from their involvement in a process of self-correcting judgment. On the other hand the subject’s sees its own cognition depend on natural and social conditions which are not under its power. It understands that these are its necessary conditions, but it does not become one with them since its unity is now spread among a dispersed multiplicity of conditions not gathered into a transparent whole. There is always more to be made explicit.

In his controversial interpretation of the section on absolute knowledge, Lumsden insists that the subject’s self-relation “cannot be explained other than through the various transformations of spirit and the changes to the subject self-understanding that the text systematically unfolds” (68). So Hegel provides neither a self separated from objects nor a process that gathers everything into a pure self presence. Instead we have an active process of judgment and self-correction.

This reading aligns Hegel with analytic attacks on “the myth of a given,”

and Lumsden finds parallels in Pinkard and Brandom, who have been influenced by Wilfrid Sellars. His description of the process of self-correction when faced by norms that have lost their force sounds much like theirs. But spirit's process of self-correction is, "contrary to Pinkard and Brandom," not identical to the reflective practices of giving and asking for reasons (108). Lumsden stresses, though, that "we are finite agents, but thought is not; it is imbued with levels of implicit and explicit determinations." The implicit background is present in an "intuitive" sense of the whole in which thought is situated," and this "troubles thought...to give a better account of itself."

Lumsden's reading of Hegel is provocative, but for it to be convincing the book would need to be longer, or have a follow-up. For example, more needs to be said to justify Lumsden's glossing dialectical transition as a process of explicitation. Since Lumsden seems not to accept Brandom's justificational meaning holism, he could say more about his move from Hegel's changing shapes of spirit to Brandom's shifting space of reasons.

Lumsden also needs to explain further how his interpretation of the intuition/concept distinction impacts Hegel's claims about the purity and transparency of thought in his *Logic*. And how do Hegel's claims square with Lumsden's assertion that "the categories that frame the basis of those judgments are made are the products of collective human history" (211)? Similarly, how does his claim that "thought is *always more* than what is explicitly affirmed in our normative commitments" (176 - my emphasis) fits with the necessity Hegel claims to find in the progressions in the *Phenomenology* and the *Logic*, and with the finality he claims for their results?

In response Lumsden refers to his 1998 article in *The Owl of Minerva* and states "there is a way of understanding the *Phenomenology's* final form of subjectivity, absolute knowing, such that the conceptual concerns of the *Logic* can be situated with regard to a reconfigured form of consciousness that is not canceled out in the move to the objectivity of

the logic” (97). That argument could have been mobilized more fully in this book.

The sections on Heidegger, Derrida, and Deleuze also seem too short. Lumsden’s concern is “to examine why [each] takes Hegel’s thought to be a metaphysics of presence” (34). He first shows how these thinkers undermine the unity of the Cartesian subject. He studies how they attribute such a unity to Hegel, and argues that their reading of Hegel is flawed. Then he suggests that they themselves fail to overcome Kant’s intuition/concept division.

Lumsden’s contends that the three thinkers fail to see the ways in which Hegel fractures and limits self-presence. However, he does not have the space to consider the complex relationships to Hegel in such devious ironic thinkers. Especially in Heidegger and Derrida, relations to Hegel are more conflicted and ambivalent than Lumsden suggests. Although he repeats Derrida’s cautions about the limits and instability of any interpretative system, his reading of Derrida on Hegel is fixed and straightforward. The author of *Glas* might have some objections.

Heidegger’s thought is examined to see the ways in which he breaks down the unity of the Cartesian subject. Besides summarizing the temporal dispersal of the care structure, Lumsden argues that Heidegger’s discussion of authenticity and the call of conscience does not make authentic Dasein an isolated self-presence. Just as Hegel’s spirit comes to know itself as a self-directed process that is dependent on social and natural conditions that it can never fully make explicit, so Heidegger’s authentic self knows itself to have a formal care structure that acquires content from being thrown amid the social context provided by *das Man* (113). Dasein can never bring its basic conditions and context into presence under its power. Authenticity is “the comprehension of the way in which norms take hold over a subject, that is, it is a recognition of how these norms frame and limit the possibilities of my existence” (118).

We are to confront the way in which our existence is necessarily framed by the possibilities into which we are thrown. This parallels Lumsden's Hegel, but elides the Kierkegaardian elements in Heidegger. The knight of faith wins out over Abraham. Though this may make for a wiser philosophy of society and politics than Heidegger actually provided, it ignores Heidegger's "history of being" and misses the transformative drama Heidegger saw in authenticity and releasement.

Derrida approaches Lumsden's Hegel when he says that self-identity is constituted by what exceeds it — "*différance* is the name we give to the 'active' moving direction of different forces" (148). But Lumsden argues that Derrida mistakenly invokes an unconceptualizable singularity beyond discourse. For example, in his discussion of justice versus ethics, a demand that goes beyond any finite economy shows the limits of any system that tries to provide generalizable meaning. Messianic Justice shows the limits of the law. This violates the self-critical space of reasons (158). For Lumsden's Hegel reason self-corrects, not by responding to a singularity beyond the law, but by making explicit its implicit commitments and ever improving the system. This disagrees with Derrida about a non-discursive condition that remains outside any system, but it does not settle the issue.

Although Lumsden sees Heidegger and Derrida as approaching Hegel's insights, he keeps Deleuze and Hegel far apart. They do agree, he thinks, in offering models of subjectivity that are antireflective, self-transcending, and decentered (179). But Deleuze argues for passive synthesis of experience from a welter of forces and intensities, relations of movement and rest, capabilities to affect and be affected (188). This can never be brought under fixed universals or made self-transparent. Lumsden sees this transcendental empiricism as an irreconcilably different starting point, outside the sphere of discourse with with no way in. Admittedly, Deleuze's notion of sensibility is far from the definite givens of the classic empiricists. But Lumsden argues that Deleuze should either affirm a pre-

Kantian given cause from outside discourse, or agree with Hegelian self-correcting thought that takes account of intuitions already containing a discursive component.

Yet Deleuze would refuse these options. He is not arguing over what is inside or outside the sphere of discursive reasoning. His *The Logic of Sense* and *What is Philosophy?* indicate that for him the very idea of an enclosed sphere of reasons is a deep mistake about the genesis of sense and the nature of concepts. Changes within discourse arise in a flow that is not unified enough to allow a bordered space of discourse; its forces should not be described as either external or internal. His disagreement with Hegel comes deeper than the two options Lumsden proposes. But this is to agree with Lumsden that Hegel lies further from Deleuze than from Heidegger and Derrida.

Lumsden writes clearly and the book is well structured. He offers intriguing suggestions for reading Hegel in ways that show him more akin to the other thinkers. He brings together history, text, and contemporary Hegel interpretation, adding his own unifying focus and new treatment of Kant's intuition/concept dichotomy. The book is, I think, too short to finish what it sets out to do, and I have mentioned raised some of the issues that might be addressed in a fuller discussion. Yet both the book's insights and its need for further elaboration invite readers along significant pathways.

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