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- A. Nuzzo *Hegel's Idea of Philosophy and the World at the End*
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BOOK SYMPOSIUM

ON ANGELICA NUZZO'S *APPROACHING HEGEL'S LOGIC, OBLIQUELY: MELVILLE, MOLIÈRE, BECKETT*

edited by Giovanna Luciano

INTRODUCTION

by Luca Illetterati*

Angelica Nuzzo is undoubtedly one of the most interesting and original contemporary interpreters of Hegel's thought. The fact that, in the last three decades, her scholarship did not fit in any of the sub-fields of the *Hegel-Forschung* accounts for her originality. Indeed, her output cannot be described according to the contraposition between metaphysical and non-metaphysical (or even anti-metaphysical) interpretations, which read Hegel's project either as a continuation of Kant's philosophy or as a radical refutation of transcendental thinking. As a result, Nuzzo's scholarship cannot be categorized in the framework of these debates. By virtue of her radical investigation and accurate analysis of the structure of Hegel's philosophy, she has never overlooked the intrinsic complexity of Hegel's thought and, accordingly, never endorsed any factional positions, which often run the risk of ignoring those internal tensions that constitute the most vital trait of Hegel's thought.

I see a clear line of continuity in Nuzzo's works on Hegel's philosophy. Her early works, published in Italian, focus mainly on the relationship between the logic of the *Science of Logic* and the specific logic of the other parts of the system. In these early publications, Nuzzo shows how the *Science of Logic* does not include a structure that, by being imposed on the domains of nature and

* Università di Padova

spirit, would make them intelligible. The spheres of natural reality and spiritual reality manifest their own specific logic that, combined with the logic of the *Science of Logic*, produces what we might call the ‘logic of the system’, which cannot be reduced to any of the specific spheres in which the system unfolds.

In many respects, her latest book *Approaching Hegel’s Logic, Obliquely: Melville, Molière, Beckett* (awarded by the *Research Group on Classical German Philosophy at the University of Padua* with the *hegel@d Prize* in 2020) reorients that same problem anew. It targets the possibility of finding a logic of reality – also understood as a logic of the epoch within which we ourselves are immersed – in Hegel’s thinking¹. In this sense *Approaching Hegel’s Logic, Obliquely* also represents the evolution of Nuzzo’s 2012 book, *Memory, History, Justice in Hegel*. In this work, the Italian scholar – who has long been teaching at CUNY – moves from the contemporary debate concerning the relationship between memory and history to the examination of Hegel’s text and develops an original understanding of Hegel’s notion of history. Her analysis pivots around Hegel’s thesis that «the generative forces of history are the principle of justice and the force of contradiction»².

I must stress an interesting part of this work, which helps me to make explicit a connection between this publication and *Approaching Hegel’s Logic, Obliquely*. In her introduction to *Memory, History, Justice*, Nuzzo contends that her study «will not display a linear development, just as the complex systematics of Hegel’s philosophy does not advance in a straight line but often returns back to itself (and, just as the work of memory, consists in a multidirectional process that connects the past, the present, and the future)»³.

The nonlinearity of the Hegelian reasoning, the necessity to work through those continuous advancements and returns imposed by Hegel’s thinking, and the very idea of a circularity – being not a simple strategy aimed at solving the epistemological problems

¹ A. Nuzzo, *Approaching Hegel’s Logic, Obliquely: Melville, Molière, Beckett*, Albany, State University of New York Press, 2018.

² Ead., *Memory, History, Justice in Hegel*, London, Palgrave Macmillan, 2012, p. 2.

³ *Ivi*, p. 3.

of the systematic structure, but a working practice of thinking itself – find in *Approaching Hegel's Logic, Obliquely* their explicit scrutiny.

The general purpose of *Approaching Hegel's Logic, Obliquely* is somehow made explicit in the second sentence of the introduction. Upon stating that the volume is an *unconventional* book on Hegel's logic, Nuzzo claims: «it is a book that arises out of the need to provide a philosophical account of the puzzle that is our present time of crisis»⁴.

The generating forces of this work are the very notion of crisis and the questions that this notion raises; they bring to light what we might call the 'standpoint' from which Hegel's logic is analyzed. The analysis of logic from the standpoint of the notion of crisis allows Nuzzo to show in what sense Hegel's philosophy in general and the *Science of Logic* in particular can be read as a philosophy and a logic of crisis as well as a logic of the transformations that such a crisis produces.

In particular, the problem posed by Nuzzo – and thus the lenses through which Nuzzo interprets Hegel's text – is the following: how is it possible to account for the continuously transforming present while we live in the present and are thus affected by the transformations that characterize the present? Or, put differently: is it possible for us to comprehend transformation while we are affected by it? The issue at stake is the following: if thinking is immanent to the transformations that we are trying to grasp, thinking itself must be able to transform itself along with the very reality it is grasping.

In *Approaching Hegel's Logic, Obliquely*, Nuzzo reads Hegel's logic as a logic of transformation; or rather, as Nuzzo herself suggests, she reads it as a logic of transformative processes. Hence, in order to articulate this idea of logic, Nuzzo interprets the different determinations of thought of Hegel's logic as *figures of action*, that is, as determinations that define what they actually are only within the framework of the action that they perform and bring forth.

In order to define what it means to interpret the determinations of thought as forms of action, Nuzzo suggests

⁴ Ead., *Approaching Hegel's Logic, Obliquely*, XIII.

that we need to go beyond a linear reading of the *Science of Logic*. Namely, we need to leave behind the interpretation that reads the *Science of Logic* as a path that begins from one point and proceeds toward a conclusion. Such a reading prevents us from grasping the distinct dynamic (i.e., transformation) embodied by the determinations of thought. Leaving behind the linear reading proves necessary to endorse an interpretation that Nuzzo calls *synchronic*, whereby determinations, while evolving from one to the other, retroact to allow for a reconsideration of their meaning. The actual experience of *reading* Hegel's logic *synchronically* constitutes the most original element of Nuzzo's interpretation. In light of the *method* that Hegel provides at the end of the *Science of Logic*, Nuzzo does not read the logic according to its linear unfolding; rather, she reads it *obliquely*, that is, with a synchronic focus on certain moments. Those moments witness to the very same action performed at different stages of the logical development, allowing for a comparison of the three different doctrines of the *Science of Logic* (*Doctrine of Being*, *Doctrine of Essence*, and *Doctrine of Concept*). Nuzzo focuses on those three actions that in her reading are actually at issue in the logic: 1) the action of *beginning*, 2) the action of *advancing*, and 3) the action of *ending*. In a very original way, Nuzzo resorts to literature to show the concreteness of these actions of thinking. She mainly refers to Herman Melville's *Billy Budd, Sailor (An Inside Narrative)*, Molière's *Le Tartuffe, ou l'imposteur*, Samuel Beckett's *Endgame*, and the last poems by Giacomo Leopardi and Elizabeth Bishop. More precisely, Nuzzo neither advocates a Hegelian interpretation of these texts, nor does she interpret them as if they were instances of Hegel's thinking. Much more persuasively, she contends the possibility of finding in these texts the concreteness and historical vitality of those movements that Hegel provides – in the form of pure thinking – in that realm of shadows that the logic yields.

In the Book Symposium that follows these introductory pages, scholars associated with the Research Group on Classical German Philosophy of the University of Padua discuss with the author on some specific aspects of Nuzzo's book.

In the first contribution, Giovanna Luciano takes into consideration the relationship between immanence and normativity.

Assuming that, according to Nuzzo's reading, logic allows us to conceive the limits and internal tensions of the present as a result of a perspective that is immanent to it, Luciano raises the question on the specific kind of critical activity towards the present that emerges from this framework.

In the second contribution, Giovanna Miolli reflects on the metaphilosophical implications of Nuzzo's 'methodological' enterprise: reading logic *obliquely* (i.e., beyond a simple linear reading of argumentative progression).

In the third contribution, Giulia Bernard goes into the specifics of Nuzzo's interpretation and focuses on the discursivity and method of Hegel's logic. In particular, Bernard analyzes the method of the *Science of Logic* by tackling those specific issues that arise when we describe transformation while experiencing it.

In the fourth contribution, Giulia La Rocca aims attention at the notion of «advancement» which is defined, so Nuzzo argues, as «the properly *transformative* moment of action». La Rocca examines and tests the possibility to understand this *advancement* in the form of *revolution*.

In the last contribution, Francesco Campana focuses on Nuzzo's use of both narrative and poetic texts in connection with her reading of the *Science of Logic*. After identifying three different 'uses' of literary texts, Campana invites Nuzzo to take a position on the cognitive value of literature and art in general.

These diverse insights are ultimately echoed in *Approaching Hegel's Logic, Obliquely: Melville, Molière, Beckett*.

Let me just conclude by saying a few words to thank Angelica Nuzzo and those who discussed the book for their extraordinary availability.