

# The Opening of Hegel's Logic and The Empty Possible World

## A Abertura da Lógica de Hegel e o Possível Mundo Vazio

MARCO SIMIONATO<sup>1</sup>

**Abstract:** In this paper I will show that a reading of the opening of Hegel's *Logic* based on possible worlds, in particular on the rejection of an absolutely empty possible world, could provide a confirmation to Hegelian thesis according to which the notion of pure being (*Sein, reines Sein*) implies the notion of determinate being (*Dasein*). In section 1, I recall Hegelian development from pure being to determinate being, by appealing to Stephen Houlgate's interpretation of the opening of Hegel's *Logic*. In section 2, I briefly recall a notion of possible world. In section 3, I try to conceive the above-mentioned Hegelian implication by means of possible worlds and by replacing the self-contradiction of becoming (*Werden*) with the rejection of an empty world and I argue that such an operation fundamentally respects Hegel's dialectic. In sections 4-8 I analyse some possible objections to my thesis and I argue that replacing the category of becoming with the notion of empty world improves Hegel's project of beginning without presuppositions.

**Keywords:** G.F.W. Hegel. Being. Nothing. Becoming. Possible Worlds. Empty World.

**Resumo:** Nesse artigo, tentarei mostrar que uma leitura da lógica de Hegel baseada em mundos possíveis, particularmente da rejeição de um mundo possível absolutamente vazio poderia fornecer a confirmação da tese hegeliana de acordo com a qual a noção de ser puro (*Sein, reines Sein*) implica a noção de ser determinado (*Dasein*). Na seção 1, eu retomo o desenvolvimento hegeliano do ser puro ao ser determinado através da interpretação de Stephen Houlgate da abertura da lógica de Hegel. Na seção 2, eu retomo brevemente a noção de mundo possível. Na seção 3, tento conceber a supracitada implicação hegeliana através dos mundos possíveis e através da substituição da autocontradição do vir-a-ser (*Werden*) com a rejeição de um mundo vazio e argumento que tal operação respeita fundamentalmente a dialética hegeliana. Nas seções 4-8, analiso algumas objeções possíveis a minha tese e argumento que substituir a categoria do devir com a noção de mundo vazio melhora o projeto de Hegel de um começo sem pressuposições.

---

<sup>1</sup> Università Ca' Foscari Venezia. E-mail: marco.simionato@hotmail.com.

## INTRODUCTION

1) In this paper I will argue that the opening of Hegel's *Logic* can be evaluated by the notion of possible worlds, in particular by replacing the Hegelian self-contradiction of becoming (*Werden*) with the rejection of an empty possible world. Then I will argue that the above-mentioned evaluation improves Hegel's project of beginning his *Logic* without assuming anything and without any intervention in the immanent process of the categories of his *Logic*, whereas in my opinion the notion of becoming as passage from being to nothing and vice versa seems to be a controversial presupposition that undermines Hegel's project<sup>2</sup>. I will base my arguments on the interpretation of the opening of Hegel's *Logic* by Houlgate (2006) because it is very appropriate for my possible worlds-approach to Hegel. There are undoubtedly other good interpretations, but I think that it is sufficient for this paper to show the possibility of a link between Lewis and Hegel on the basis of at least one influential interpretation of Hegel, such as Houlgate's interpretation.

Hegel's *Logic* begins with the simple notion of being (*Sein*), even if the real beginning will appear to be the determinate being (*Dasein*). However Hegel begins with *Sein* because his logic wants to be presuppositionless:

thought that sets aside all its assumptions about *what* it is, is left with nothing to think but the simple thought *that* it is. Hegel's presuppositionless science of logic begins, therefore, with the thought of thought itself as simply *being* - not being anything in particular but simple *be-ing* as such.

(Houlgate, (2006), p.31. I am going to recall the opening of Hegel's *Logic* mainly referring to Houlgate's work of the same name)

---

<sup>2</sup> We will see that the "presuppositionlessness" is very controversial also in my possible worlds-strategy. Anyway, I will show that Hegel's strategy itself is more controversial. Therefore my aim is to *improve* the notion of presuppositionlessness, by relaxing Hegel's ontological commitment (in particular his commitment to the category of becoming). Besides, I will show that the notion of presuppositionlessness is strictly related to the notion of empty possible world; therefore my strategy will turn out to be a way for conceiving that notion.

Since such a simple being is not anything in particular, it is different from any determination: it is absolutely indeterminate, it has no content and nothing can be thought about it. Therefore it is equivalent of nothing (*Nichts*), because the latter is exactly the absence of all determinations, the absolute indeterminate. So:

(I) Being (*Sein*) = NOT-(*a,b,c,...,n*) = Nothing (*Nichts*)<sup>3</sup>

Since being reveals itself as nothing and vice versa, Hegel can state that the first «does not pass over but has passed over into nothing, and nothing into being» (SL in Houlgate 2006, p. 195 (Henceforward I consider the translation of Hegel's Logic that appears in Houlgate's text and I mark it as: SL in Houlgate (2006)); there are not two things – being and nothing – that are separated and that become respectively the opposite, because the fact that being is the same as nothing does not appear at a certain instant of time and one cannot think about being without thinking about it as immediately identical to nothing.

However, Hegel also notes that being and nothing are distinct. In fact – I think - *Sein* is not *a,b,c,...,n* for a different reason than *Nichts* (or *Sein* and *Nichts* negate any determination for different reasons), although the result of this negation is the same, i.e. the indeterminate.

The truly difference between being and nothing can be grasped if one considers them as *moments* of becoming (*Werden*), i.e. a «movement in which both are distinguished, but by a difference which has equally immediately resolved itself» (SL in Houlgate (2006), p.195). The Hegelian notion of 'moment' (*das Moment*) allows us to better understand this point. Hegelian moment (that I am considering) is not an instant of time, but it is an aspect of a structure that *cannot be separated* from the structure itself or from the other aspects of it; yet such an aspect *can be distinguished* from the structure or from the other aspects of it. Therefore being and nothing cannot be separated from their structure, i.e. becoming, but they can be distinguished in the following way. The passage from nothing to being (the fact that nothing reveals itself as being) can be distinguished from the passage from being to nothing (the fact that being reveals itself as nothing): the first is *coming-to-be* and the latter is *ceasing-to-be*. So, when we consider

---

<sup>3</sup> *a, b, c,...,n* are all actual or possible determinations (things, objects, events, sets, universals, etc.).

being and nothing as moments, we find their original truth, i.e. ‘ceasing-to-be’ and ‘coming-to-be’: «both [being and nothing] are the same, *becoming*, and although they differ so in direction they interpenetrate and paralyse each other» (SL in Houlgate 2006, p. 199). Yet becoming is not the *real* beginning. Becoming is intrinsically self-contradictory because each moment is opposed to the other: being vanishes into nothing and *vice versa*. So «their vanishing is the vanishing of becoming or the vanishing of the vanishing itself» (SL in Houlgate 2006, p. 199). But this “self-destruction” of becoming does not imply pure nothing as result: since becoming is always *becoming of something*, being and nothing – as moments, i.e. ceasing-to-be and coming-to-be – unify themselves into a determination (*Dasein*, determinate being) that exactly *came to be* and that *will cease to be*.

This development from *Sein* to *Dasein* is a good example for showing how Hegel proceeds in his Logic, although the transition from pure being to determinate being does not necessarily reflect an Hegelian assumed “method” (neither a dialectical one), since the starting point is a presuppositionless thought (therefore a thought without *any* assumption)<sup>4</sup>. However, I think it is useful for the aim of this paper to point out a sort of Hegelian “dialectical method”, that can be described as Forster (1993) does:

[...] category A proves to contain a contrary category, B, and conversely [...] category B proves to contain category A, thus showing both category to be self-contradictory. He [i.e. Hegel] then seeks to show that this negative result has a positive outcome, a new category C. [...] This new category unites [...] the preceding categories A and B.

(Forster 1993, p. 132. See also section 7 in this paper).

Let us consider the beginning of the *Science of Logic* by means of Hegel’s dialectical strategy. We can state that:

A is *being* (*Sein*)

B is *nothing* (*Nichts*)

C is *determinate being* (*Dasein*)

Besides I think it is very useful adding the following:

---

<sup>4</sup> About this question, see Houlgate (2006), chapter 2: *Does Hegel have a method?*

A\* is *being as moment* (of becoming), i.e. *ceasing-to-be* (because it is the movement or the passage from being to nothing)

B\* is *nothing as moment* (of becoming), i.e. *coming-to-be* (because it is the movement or the passage from nothing to being)

C\* is *becoming* (*Werden*), i.e. the self-contradictory unit structure of being and nothing

2) Let us consider a notion of possible worlds as follows: a possible world is an entity that represents a maximal (all-encompassing, complete) consistent situation according to which things are. (Maybe, it could be a notion within what Divers (2002, p.179) calls “book realism”, but that specification is not necessarily required by my strategy. For the moment, I just ask the reader to bear in mind a representational notion of possible worlds. Anyway we will see that my strategy can also work with other notions of possible worlds). Given that, an empty possible world is a world that represents no objects at all<sup>5</sup>

3) Let us consider the identity (I) between being and nothing as absolute indeterminate, i.e. the absence of any determination(s) such that – again –

A is *being*

B is *nothing*

and they are the same since they can both be reduced to NOT-(*a,b,c,...n*). Let us try to show whether one can derive determinate being (*Dasein*) – the category C – by means of possible worlds-strategy.

What could A\*, B\* and C\* be? I am going to argue that C\* is an empty world and A\*, B\* are the “moments” (in the Hegelian meaning of *das Moment*) of such a world.

What are we really thinking about when we think about the absolute indeterminate as being or nothing? One could “translate” these notions as empty world (as – *de facto* – analytic metaphysicians have done by thinking

---

<sup>5</sup> For the sake of my arguments, I will understand the empty world as *absolutely empty*, namely as a world that represents neither abstract objects, nor concrete objects. Instead an empty world can be also intended as a world that represents no concrete objects, but at which there are abstract objects. In this work, I use ‘empty world’ or ‘absolutely empty world’ as equivalent phrases, except for the parts where I highlight the distinction.

about nothing as empty world<sup>6</sup>). When one thinks of the negation of any determination, then one is *representing* the all-encompassing consistent “situation” – broadly speaking – according to which there are no objects, no determinations, no entities. Therefore one is appealing to an empty world (see section 2 for the required notion of world). Instead of meaning *ceasing-to-be* and *coming-to-be*, A\* and B\* are respectively:

A\* is the world as such;

B\* is the “content” of the world, i.e. what such a world represents, i.e. the absence of any determinations.

These moments are in contradiction, as in Hegelian account. The empty world is a determination that represents the absence of any determinations, *included itself*. Therefore the world-moment (A\*) is in contradiction to the other moment, i.e. the absence of *unrestrictedly every* things. In turn, the moment B\*, *as absence of all things*, is in contradiction with the world-moment, because B\* is the absence of all things but there is at least a thing that is the empty world (in other words, the absence of all things – *as represented* – implies the existence of a thing, that *represents* it). So we should reject the existence of an absolutely empty world, since the latter is exactly a contradictory entity. In other words, all worlds are non-empty<sup>7</sup>.

So, like the category of becoming in Hegel, the empty world (C\*) is self-contradictory and it is the “vanishing” of itself: this is a way to understand the rejection of the empty world and to show his affinity to Hegel (at least in such a fundamental metaphysical question). Finally, in Hegel the self-negation of becoming does not imply *nihil absolutum* as result, but the existence of determinate being (*Dasein*), as well as the rejection of the empty world implies that each world is non-empty, i.e. there is at least a determinate being in every possible world (not necessarily the same in every world).

---

<sup>6</sup> For an overview on this topic, see Coggins (2010).

<sup>7</sup> The debate about the empty world is usually restricted to a world with no concrete objects in it, but at which there are abstract objects. Instead I am considering a world with neither *concreta*, nor *abstracta*. The arguments for the existence of an empty world are all based on the subtraction argument by Baldwin (1996). There are no available arguments for the existence of an absolutely empty possible world. I proposed an argument for the latter in [*reference removed for blind review*]. Anyway, in this paper, I do not consider my previous work for the sake of the present interpretation. Indeed I suppose that the existence of an absolutely empty world is an ambiguous issue.

My interpretation of the opening of Hegel's logic by means of possible worlds could be also useful for eluding one of the fundamental objections of Schelling (and other philosophers) against Hegel. According to Schelling, «the thought of pure being with which Hegel claims to begin the *Logic* is in fact one in which “nothing is thought” – indeed, it is an “un-thought” – and Hegel's assertion that “pure being is nothing” is just an empty tautology stating that “nothing is nothing”» (Houlgate 2006, pp. 103-104). If the identity between pure being and nothing is not the identification of contrary categories, as Schelling seems to claim, then there is no contradiction and so there is not a development or passage from pure being to nothing. If we assumed that this objection works, then there would be just the category of nothing and there would not be the vanishing of a category (pure being) into its contrary (nothing). However, I think that just this category of nothing could imply the passage to determinate being (*Dasein*), if we considered it – as I said before – by means of possible worlds, since nothing(ness) as the absolute absence of all determinations can be represented as an empty world. Therefore, the tautology that Schelling points out – “nothing is nothing” – would be in fact “the empty world is the empty world”. But I have showed that an empty world can be conceived as a two-moments self-contradictory structure that necessarily negates itself, so that there are only non-empty worlds, i.e. in every world there is at least one determinate being (*Dasein*).

4) One could object that appealing to (an account of) possible worlds is a premise that one must assume as true in order to “translate” the opening of Hegel's *Logic* by means of possible worlds, while in contrast Hegel's aim – as I said before – is a presuppositionless thought: “The beginning must be an *absolute* [...] and so it *may not presuppose anything*, must not be mediated by anything nor have a ground; rather it is to be itself the ground of the entire science” (SL in Hegel, 2006, p. 29)

However such an idea of presuppositionless beginning commits Hegel to the notion of indeterminate or pure being (see section 1 in this paper). Certainly, the notion of pure being vanishes (into nothing, and vice versa), yet «Hegel is not asserting that both [i.e. being and nothing] vanish *before* they can even be thought» (Houlgate 2006, p. 272). So Hegel claims that pure being (and nothing) can be thought and grasped and «logically what they are thought to be, and what they *are*, is nothing but their *vanishing*. The fact that they vanish the moment they are thought does not demonstrate that their

immediacy somehow eludes our grasp» (Houlgate 2006, p. 272). I sum up: the notion of presuppositionlessness (*Voraussetzungslosigkeit*) commits Hegel to the notion of indeterminate being; and such a notion, by vanishing into nothing (and *vice versa*), reveals itself as vanishing itself, where this vanishing is the category of becoming - according to Hegel. Could my interpretation of Hegel betray the above mentioned notion of presuppositionlessness? I think that what I need in order to go on with my interpretation is ontologically less binding than Hegel's commitment to the notion of becoming as passage from being to nothing (and *viceversa*), as I will recall later. Indeed, at this point of my understanding of the opening of Hegel's Logic by means of possible worlds (where the point is the passage from pure being/pure nothing to the empty possible world) I just need to follow the notion of presuppositionlessness as well as Hegel does. If presuppositionlessness implies the notion of absolute indeterminate, i.e. being and then nothing and then their vanishing, similarly in my approach the notion of presuppositionlessness implies the notion of absolute indeterminate, i.e. pure being and then nothing and *then the empty world*. Indeed, what does one think about when one thinks about the notion of absolute indeterminate? One represents a maximal consistent situation – broadly speaking - at which there are no entities; but the representation of a maximal consistent situation things could be is exactly a possible world, without any further commitment – for the moment- to some other aspects of a particular account of possible world; and the representation of the maximal consistent situation according to which there are no objects at all is exactly an empty possible world. After introducing the empty possible world, one must evaluate it: if it is a self-contradictory entity, then Hegelian development from *Sein* to *Dasein* works from a possible worlds' metaphysical point of view, as I showed before; instead, if it is not self-contradictory, then one could accept (at least *prima facie*) an empty possible world in its own ontology and Hegelian development would not be confirmed by means of possible worlds-strategy.

*En passant* I note that even if we assumed a – say – “concretist” account of possible world<sup>8</sup>, e.g. Lewis (1986)'s account, an absolutely empty

---

<sup>8</sup> I take the phrase ‘concretism’ by Menzel (2013).



world would be a self-contradictory entity. According to Lewis, an empty world should be rejected because:

If a world is a maximal mereological sum of spatiotemporally interrelated things, that makes no provision for an absolutely empty world. A world is not like a bottle that might hold no beer. The world *is* the totality of things it contains. [...] There can be nothing much: just some homogeneous unoccupied spacetime, or maybe only one single point of it. But nothing much is still something, and there isn't any world where there's nothing at all (Lewis 1986 p.73).

Therefore, the Lewisian empty world would be a two-moments structure: the world as such would be the mereological sum as sum (of no parts): moment (A\*\*); and the absence of any determinations would be the “content” of such a world, i.e. the absence of any part: moment (B\*\*). Now, (A\*\*) would be in contradiction respect to (B\*\*) because (A\*\*) would be a sum that is not a sum, being without parts. Similarly, if we assumed a “combinatorialist” account of possible world, namely a conception of possible world as recombination of metaphysical simples, we could not admit an empty world. Since an absolutely empty world does not rearrange any metaphysical simple, it is a self-contradictory object, a recombination of simples that is not a recombination of simples. Finally, if we conceived possible worlds as maximal consistent states of affairs – as in Plantingan realism -, we should not admit an empty world too: the latter would be a state of affairs according to which there are no entities at all, but there would be (at least) the state of affairs itself, *self-contradicting*. Therefore, my reading seems to work not only within a “representational” account of possible worlds, but also within the other main conceptions of possible worlds.

Besides, I recall and highlight that in Hegel being and nothing are thought *before their vanishing as vanishing themselves*; similarly in my possible worlds-strategy, being and nothing are thought before their vanishing as empty world: the absolute indeterminate is represented by the empty world and one can think about that structure (the empty world as world and its “content”, i.e. what it represents), one can grasp it, before its “vanishing”, where its “vanishing” is the exclusion of it from our ontology because it is a self-contradictory entity (like in Hegel, where vanishing as becoming – *Werden* – vanishes because it is self-contradictory: see section 1 in this paper).

5) The objection against my approach to Hegel's Logic, referring to the lack of presuppositionlessness, can be reintroduced at this point. According to several account of possible worlds, there can be worlds with only abstract object(s), i.e. – broadly speaking – objects that do not exist in space or in space-time, e.g. numbers, sets, properties, etc<sup>9</sup>. Since an abstract object is not in time, it cannot be considered as a becoming entity and a genuine *Dasein*; therefore – the objection claims - in my approach to Hegel's opening of Logic, a world with only *abstracta* in it would be a world that fails to represent a genuine *Dasein* and the development from *Sein* to *Dasein* would not work necessarily, because there would be non-empty worlds (worlds with only abstract entities in it), but without genuine determinate beings. So such an objection affirms that considering C\* as empty world instead of the category of becoming requires a big presumption, i.e. the choice for accounts of possible worlds (or the choice of metaphysical assumptions) that do not allow the possibility of worlds with only abstract objects in it; or it requires the presumption that abstract objects does not exist and there are only concrete objects. Of course, there are good arguments for these premises. But it is a problem just assuming premises since Hegel's Logic wants to be presuppositionless, as I showed before. Therefore one can again object that my approach to Hegel's Logic requires the truth of certain discussed premises, betraying Hegel's aim.

I think I can propose a reply to this objection. The main point at issue is whether the notions of determinate being, becoming entity and (spatio)temporal entity *convertuntur*. Well, I think that an entity can be determined regardless it is something that becomes or it is not. What is minimally required for being determinate is just being different from another entity (*omnis determinatio est negatio*). Therefore, both a concrete object (that becomes or does not become) and an abstract object (that cannot become) are similarly determinate, although the latter is not in time. Since in my possible worlds-interpretation of Hegel's Logic the notion of becoming is replaced by the notion of empty world, I am not committed to the notion of

---

<sup>9</sup> Of course, there is a big debate about how abstract/concrete distinction should be drawn, but I cannot deal with it in this paper because of space. Therefore I assume – for the sake of the objection - that the distinction between abstract and concrete objects is based on the notion of space-time.

time or passage in time; so a world with only non-(spatio)-temporal objects is anyway a world with a determinate being, even if it is not in time. Therefore the objection fails. Certainly, the objector could state – at this point – that there is nothing beyond time, i.e. there are no abstract objects. But, if it is so, then a world with only abstract objects is simply an absolutely empty world (since *abstracta* do not exist) and so the objection cannot be made up. So Hegel or an Hegelian have two options: i) ruling out abstract objects (namely non-(spatio)-temporal objects) for holding the thesis according to which any *Dasein* becomes, therefore it is in (space)-time (i.e. it is a concrete object); ii) admitting abstract objects, but stating that determinate being (*Dasein*) is not necessarily an entity that becomes (since an abstract object is not in time). But the case (ii) is something more consistent with my own approach to Hegel's development from *Sein* to *Dasein*, since I do not use the notion of becoming. (One could object that the notion of time does not belong to Science of Logic, since it is considered in the Philosophy of Nature. See section 8 for this objection).

One should note that my above-mentioned interpretation has less premises than Hegel's one. Indeed, for holding that an entity is determinate if and only if it becomes – as he seems to claim - Hegel seems to be forced to assume that there are no abstract objects (therefore everything becomes, i.e. everything is in time), i.e. a premise that could undermine his presuppositionless thought/project. Instead, in my approach, the development from the category C\* (empty world) to determinate being (C) works regardless of the truth of the premise according to which there are no abstract objects. So my possible worlds-strategy doesn't need to assume such a premise.

In the matter of presuppositionlessness and in relation to the previous considerations, I would also highlight that the presence of a category of *becoming*, considered as passage from being to nothing and *vice versa*, is quite controversial from a contemporary metaphysical (and physical) point of view. So, the Hegelian passage from *Sein* to *Dasein* is “overloaded” with the controversial notion of becoming as passage from being to nothing and from

nothing to being, whereas my possible worlds-strategy does not need the controversial notion of becoming<sup>10</sup>.

7) According to Forster (1993), Hegel has a sort of method (that I briefly recalled in section 2), but he also thinks that the opening of Hegel's Logic does not seem to respect it, since there is an arduous passage from becoming to determinate being:

The problem here lies not so much in Hegel's idea that, having discovered two contrary categories to be mutually implying and therefore self-contradictory, one might find some new category that eliminated the self-contradiction by unifying them in a manner that in a sense preserved while in a sense abolishing them [...]. The problem lies rather in the suggestion that the transition to this new category might be a *necessary* one

(Forster 1993, p. 145)

Forster notes that it seems that there are no justifications for the necessity of the transition from being/nothing to determinate being through becoming and he deals with the question about which sense of necessity one should adopt in such a transition.

I think that the possible worlds-approach to Hegelian transition from *Sein* to *Dasein* can show the reason of the necessity, since one doesn't need to pass through the category of becoming, but just through the notion of empty world. An empty world is self-contradictory because what it represents negates the existence of the world itself, and – symmetrically – the existence of the world itself negates what is represented. Indeed, as I pointed out before, a thing (a world) according to which there are *absolutely* no things is something that negates its own presence; and the absence of all things that is represented by a thing (the world) is self-refuted since it is represented by a thing that is not absent. Therefore, the impossibility of the

---

<sup>10</sup> The notion of becoming is controversial in Hegel for two reasons. The first one is that – as I have said - he thinks it as a passage from being to nothing and *vice versa* and I think that such a definition is quite controversial from the point of view of the contemporary metaphysics and physics. The second one is that the question of becoming «have been debated for more than two millennia, with no resolution in sight» (Savitt, Steven, "Being and Becoming in Modern Physics", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Fall 2013 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <<http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2013/entries/spacetime-bebecome/>>.

existence of an empty world (that is in general the impossibility of the existence of a contradictory entity) implies that the worlds are *necessarily* non-empty, i.e. in each world there is at least one determinate being (*Dasein*) - although it is not the same entity in each world<sup>11</sup>.

8) One could object that I give a temporal interpretation to the Hegelian notion of becoming and – consequently – to the Hegelian notion of determinate being, by using wrongly the category of time, although it does not belong to the opening of Hegel’s Logic, but rather to the Philosophy of Nature. Surely this objection is “philologically” good, if we are interested just in what Hegel meant; however I would reply to such an objection by noting that Hegelian notion of becoming as passage from being to nothing and vice versa is a structure of two moments – ceasing to be and coming to be – that would be *meaningless* without the notion of time. Even if Hegel does not appeal to the notion of time for presenting the passage from being to nothing, it is clear that, without appealing to a temporal process, the moments of becoming would be hardly conceivable. Therefore also the Hegelian notion of determinate being will be inevitably committed to a temporal aspect, since it derives from the notion of becoming.

9) Another fundamental objection against my strategy could be the following. As Redding (2010) notes,

Regardless of how we interpret this however, it is important to grasp that for Hegel logic is not simply a science of the *form* of our thoughts but is also a science of actual “content” as well, and as such is a type of *ontology*. Thus it is not just about the concepts “being,” “nothing,” “becoming” and so on, but about *being, nothing, becoming* and so on, *themselves*. This in turn is linked to Hegel’s radically non-representationalist (and in some sense “direct realist” ) understanding of thought. The world is not “represented” in thought by a type of “proxy” standing for it, but rather is presented, exhibited, or made manifest for the mind in thought (2010).

whereas I proposed a *representationalist* understanding of *being* and *nothing* as the maximal consistent situation exactly *represented* by an empty world. Anyway, I think that we risk ending up in a blind alley, if we let *being* and *nothing* exhibit themselves. Indeed, they are the negation of any

---

<sup>11</sup> Of course, there are philosophers that admit existing impossible entities and existing impossible worlds, but I don’t consider this issue here because I think the interesting question is linking the opening of Hegel’s Logic to the notion of empty possible world.

determination: no determination will exhibit itself. Of course, Hegel provides a solution by appealing to the category of becoming (*Werden*) and then by appealing to what becomes (*Dasein*), the latter being the *real* beginning. But – as I pointed out before – the category of becoming is exactly one of the main trouble within Hegel’s strategy. Therefore I suppose to be less controversial appealing to a representational account of possible world in order to conceive *being* and *nothing*.

10) In this last section I am going to clarify and summarize which core ideas of Hegel<sup>12</sup> can be kept in my proposal and which claims should be ignored or modified, in order to make possible worlds-interpretation of Hegel more justifiable.

The most important Hegel’s point that I endorse in this paper is the notion of presuppositionlessness (*Voraussetzungslosigkeit*), as I have presented since the first section. From this notion, Hegel’s Logic shows the passage from *Sein* to *Dasein* as well as it is shown in my interpretation, although through a different strategy. The second fundamental idea that I acquire from Hegel’s Logic is the notion of being as absolutely indeterminate; such a notion is strictly linked to the notion of presuppositionlessness, as I recalled in the first section. However, to this end, I propose to follow an alternative path, composed of two main steps that I will recall below, in order to account for the category of being and – consequently – for the category of nothing.

The first step is alternative to Houlgate’s interpretation of Hegel and it is useful for the second step, i.e. for the possible worlds-reading of the opening of Hegel’s Logic. The first step consists in understanding the category of being, i.e. the absolute indeterminate, as the negation of every determination. Indeed, the absence of any presupposition, that is “the thought of thought itself as simply *being* - not being anything in particular but simple *be-ing* as such” (Houlgate 2006, p. 31), could be understood as the negation of any determination.

The second step is just an attempt to give an account for the notion of *absence of everything* or *negation of everything*. At this end, I considered

---

<sup>12</sup> I mean – at least – Houlgate’s interpretation of the opening of Hegel’s Logic.

possible worlds' device as a profitable way for my aim (see in particular section 3). Certainly the appealing to possible worlds' conceptual equipment seems to contradict the notion of presuppositionlessness, being a huge presupposition. However, as I pointed out in section 4, the notion of presuppositionlessness itself commits Hegel to the notion of absolute indeterminate, i.e. – according to the first step above – to the notion of absence of everything. Besides one should note that a representational conception of possible worlds seem to be less problematic than some Hegel's implicit premises, in particular respect to Hegel's notion of becoming (*Werden*) as passage from being to nothing. Finally I have also pointed out that the absolutely empty world turns out to be a two-moments self-contradictory structure also in non-representationalist accounts of possible worlds, as in Lewisian concretism, or in combinatorialism, or in Plantingan realism.

Finally, another fundamental Hegel's point that I keep in my proposal is the claim according to which the notion of *Dasein* necessarily derives from the notion of pure being (*Sein*), and so it necessarily derives from the notion of presuppositionlessness. One should note that *I don't mean* that the notion of being as absolute indeterminate implies the notion of determinate being because the absolute indeterminate is the determinate absence of any determination. Rather my proposal is the following: since the absolute indeterminate is the absence of any determination (without assuming necessarily or *prima facie* that this absence is a determination); since we can understand this phrase – 'absence of any determination' – by means of possible worlds-strategy (in order to make this phrase less "mystical" or "mysterious" as possible); and since the notion of empty possible world is self-contradictory (see section 3), then there are just non-empty possible worlds, i.e. worlds with determinate beings. In other words, the introduction of an empty possible world for giving an account of the absence of any determination *is not* a sort of "overlap" between a determination (the empty possible world) and the absence of any determination. As in any possible world, one should distinguish between the world itself and what such a world *represents*. In the case of an empty world, the world itself is a determination, but what it represents is the absence of any determination. Therefore the empty world is such that one can distinguish, but one cannot separate, the empty world itself from the absence of any determination (see section 3), as

well as in Hegel the two *moments* of becoming can be *distinguished*, but they cannot be *separated*. The two moments of the empty world (the determinate world and the absence of any determination) are in contradiction, but they are not simply the same, as well as in Hegel being and nothing are distinct moments of becoming. If one didn't distinguish the two moments of the empty worlds as I did, then one should state that the absolute indeterminate is *identical to a determination* (i.e. to the empty world *as world*); *but this is not what I propose*. Rather – since I distinguish the two moments of the empty world – I propose something like this: the absolute indeterminate is *represented by a determination*.

As we have seen, my possible worlds-reading of Hegel's opening of Logic needs to understand Hegelian category of being as negation of any determination, moving away from Houlgate's interpretation of being (but keeping the idea of presuppositionlessness). Indeed, according to Houlgate, "pure being immediately vanishes into nothing because it is so pure and indeterminate that logically it is not even the very being it is" (2006, p. 280); instead in my proposal I must hold that being is the negation of any determination.

At this regard, I underline that in my interpretation I must use some notions as *possibility, world, consistency, representation*, etc. – whereas Hegel endorses a notion of pure being that is not a world, a possible world, a consistent situation, etc. That is certainly true; but these notions – or in general possible worlds as "representations of consistent situations" – can help us to give an account for the category of pure being (and pure nothing) that seems to be *prima facie* a very controversial category, above all in contemporary analytic metaphysics. Indeed, since I consider pure being as negation of any determination, then these notions do not undermine the idea of pure being, but they clarify it (see section 4).

We have seen that I need to replace Hegel's notion of becoming as passage from being to nothing in order to show an alternative strategy for deriving *Dasein* from *Sein*. This is in my opinion one of the most important advantage of my interpretation of Hegel's Logic.

In summary I think that my reconstruction of the opening of Hegel's Logic could contribute to make Hegel's thought more attractive to analytic metaphysics, provided that we are disposed to leave behind or to reinterpret some Hegelian conceptions.



## REFERENCES

- Baldwin, T. (1996), *There might be nothing*. *Analysis*, 56, 231-238.
- Coggins, G. (2010), *Could there have been nothing? Against metaphysical nihilism*, London: Plagrave Mcmillan.
- Divers, J. (2002), *Possible worlds*, London: Routledge
- Forster, M. (1993), *Hegel's dialectical method* , in *The Cambridge companion to Hegel*, ed. F.C. Beiser, Cambridge: Cambridge University press
- Hegel, G.F.W., *Science of Logic*, trans. A. V. Miller, London: Allen and Unwin, 1969.
- Houlgate, S. (2006), *The opening of Hegel's Logic: from being to infinity*, Purdue University Press.
- Lewis, D. (1986), *On the Plurality of Worlds*, Oxford: Blackwell Publishers.
- Menzel, C. (2013). "Possible Worlds". In: Zalta E.N. (ed), *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Spring 2014 Edition). Available at URL = <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2014/entries/possible-worlds/>
- Redding P. (2010). "Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel", In Zalta, E. (ed.), *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2014/entries/hegel/>