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# Battling for Metaphysics: The Case for Indispensability

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**Abstract:** The aim of this paper is to propose that both Hegel and Peirce are committed to two arguments against the notion that metaphysics is impossible, where not only do they claim metaphysics is possible, but that they also insist on the indispensability of this philosophical discipline. In the first argument, both Hegel and Peirce argue that it is impossible to eliminate metaphysical concepts from ordinary language and our scientific practices. In the second argument, both Hegel and Peirce argue that metaphysics is a necessary part of intellectual enquiry on the grounds that metaphysics is indispensable for human development. Such is the philosophical significance of both their views on the indispensability of metaphysics that there is every reason to regard Hegel and Peirce as representing powerful challenges to eliminativist attitudes to metaphysical enquiry. The purpose of my paper is to justify the exercise of metaphysics as a “humanistic discipline”, to use an expression from Bernard Williams. Using perfectionist approaches to ethics as a framework in which to contextualise the question of whether it could ever be desirable to eliminate metaphysics is under-explored and potentially a major avenue through which to explore the way we do metaphysics today.

**Keywords:** Hegel, Peirce, Metaphysics, Indispensability, Eliminativism, Perfectionism

## I

Hegel and Peirce are metaphysical thinkers. By ‘a metaphysical thinker’ – to take my lead from Jonathan Lowe’s definition of metaphysics<sup>1</sup> – I mean someone who makes general enquiries into the fundamental structure of reality as a whole.<sup>2</sup> As is

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<sup>1</sup> Compare this with Adrian Moore’s definition of metaphysics: “Metaphysics is the most general attempt to make sense of things”. (Moore 2012: 1).

<sup>2</sup> Lowe (2002: 2–3). It is important to note that no definition of metaphysics is ever likely to meet with universal acceptance, simply because the concept of metaphysics is essentially a contested concept.

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well-known, one of Kant's principal aims in the Critique of Pure Reason is to establish the limits of human cognition, and thereby provide a new foundation for metaphysical enquiry: he sees metaphysics as being dependent on certain epistemological principles being established about what human beings can know and what human beings cannot know – i. e. our conception of metaphysics is going to rely on what epistemological principles we can establish about how our cognition works and how, if at all, it can (and invariably) does go wrong. Though Kant defines metaphysics as the cognitive enterprise that aims to grasp the unconditioned (infinite) through pure reason (cf. B7, 378–88, 395), one should not take such utterances to tell us everything about how Kant understands the discipline, for he draws an important distinction between 'general metaphysics' (*metaphysica generalis*) and 'special metaphysics' (*metaphysica specialis*).

General metaphysics (ontology) is concerned with the nature of objects in general and our cognition of objects in general, whereas special metaphysics is concerned with our cognition of a particular class of objects, namely God, the world, and the self of rational psychology as presented by Descartes, Leibniz, Wolff, and others. Given that general metaphysics and special metaphysics have different objects of enquiry, each discipline makes a specific error which is exposed in a unique way. With regard to general metaphysics, Kant argues that philosophers such as Leibniz and Wolff hold that one can acquire knowledge of objects in general merely through either the laws of general logic, such as the Principle of Non-Contradiction, or through the exercise of the pure concepts of the understanding, the concepts of transcendental logic. The error of general metaphysics, then, is that it violates one of the principles of Kant's Discursivity Thesis, namely that concepts without intuitions are empty, where the error consists in holding that the unschematised use of categorial concepts, i. e. the application of concepts independently of the conditions of sensibility, establishes knowledge (or at least determinate cognition) of objects. A consequence of acknowledging this mistake, as Kant famously states, is that "... the proud name of ontology, which presumes to offer synthetic a priori cognitions of things in general ... must give way to the more modest title of a transcendental analytic" (A247/B304). What this means is that given the failure of general metaphysics to justify synthetic a priori knowledge, due to its dogmatism, the only viable means of adequately justifying this kind of knowledge is to be provided by a transcendental analysis of our cognitive capacities.

With regard to special metaphysics, the error of this area of metaphysics consists in judgements concerning God, the world, and the immortal and immaterial self being infected with transcendental illusion – the conflation of our cognitive interests and the conceptual features of certain phenomena with the determination of things in themselves: for example, our judgements about the self being a simple, immaterial

substance are based on the illegitimate conflation of conceptual properties of the notion of the self – that of simplicity, unity, and subjectivity – with a metaphysics of the self as something simple and substantial. In other words, we commit the fallacy of hypostatisation when we think about the self from the perspective of rational psychology. Indeed, rational psychology, according to Kant, is just one of the branches of special metaphysics that is infected with various fallacies, such as paralogisms, amphibolies, subreption and hypostatisation, because these formal errors permeate our cognitive practices when we also engage with the philosophical questions and methodologies of rational cosmology and rational theology.

While these critical comments from Kant about metaphysics may still leave room for metaphysics in some sense (as Kant seems to have wanted), I am just using Kant's critique of metaphysics to provide a background to the different approach offered by Hegel and Peirce in what follows.

Starting with Hegel, we find his response is rather emphatic:

[E]veryone possesses and uses the wholly abstract category of being. The sun is in the sky; these grapes are ripe, and so on ad infinitum. Or, in a higher sphere of education, we proceed to the relation of cause and effect, force and its manifestation, etc. All our knowledge and ideas are entwined with metaphysics like this and governed by it; it is the net which holds together all the concrete material which occupies us in our action and endeavour. But this net and its knots are sunk in our ordinary consciousness beneath numerous layers of stuff. This stuff comprises our known interests and the objects that are before our minds, while the universal threads of the net remain out of sight and are not explicitly made the subject of our reflection. (LHP: 27–8)

Categories, like being, or singularity, are already mingled into every proposition, even what it has a completely sensible content: "This leaf is green". (EL: §3, 27)

For Hegel, not only is metaphysics possible and viable, metaphysics is also unavoidable. Hegel denies that it is possible to have a standpoint in which our concern for ordinary states of affair is free from metaphysical speculation and concepts. In other words, it is impossible for us to not have metaphysical commitments in some way or another even when we are in situations which seem paradigmatic cases of ordinary language usage.<sup>3</sup> To quote David Oderberg, who would agree with Hegel on this subject:

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<sup>3</sup> Interestingly, however, one may claim what Hegel argues, namely that metaphysical concepts are ineliminable in language, does not obviously mean metaphysical concepts bind enquirers to engage in speculative philosophy, which is a very specific genus of metaphysical enquiry. In response, though, I do not think Hegel's aim in the passages I quoted is to justify the unavoidability of speculative idealism, rather his concerns here are more modest. The task of characterising metaphysical concepts in a speculative way – i. e. using dialectical logic to make sense of concepts such as finitude and infinity – is not the focus of Hegel's attention in the above passages, but is of course a central aspect of his work on metaphysics.

Natural language is permeated and saturated by metaphysics, and has been so ever since philosophy began with the pre-Socratics ... The problem is in thinking that there is a vantage point from which we can espy language in its 'ordinary', pre-metaphysical state. There is no such vantage point because there is no such language to be observed in the first place.<sup>4</sup>

The unavoidability of metaphysics, therefore, consists in the ubiquity of metaphysical concepts in language.<sup>5</sup> A similar claim is made by Lowe, who writes: “[i]n my view, all other forms of inquiry rest upon metaphysical presuppositions – thus making metaphysics unavoidable – so that we should at least endeavour to do metaphysics with our eyes open, rather than allowing it to exercise its influence upon us at the level of uncritical assumption”.<sup>6</sup>

In response, the Kantian may well agree that we have metaphysical concepts in our thinking, and that we ought to investigate those concepts in order to get clear about our thinking. However, this does not mean that we should think we can do anything more than conduct an enquiry of this sort, and instead take ourselves to be thereby investigating the world as it ultimately is. To quote Lowe here, though,

ironically enough, any such attempt [to focus on the structure of thought and separate that enquiry from the structure of being] would undermine the very position [the Kantian] is trying to defend: for in order to make any such attempt, the Kantian will have to engage in genuine metaphysical argument as traditionally conceived. He will have to deny a certain thesis concerning the nature of a certain category of entities – thoughts – conceived as being elements of a mind-independent reality ... Questions to do with content themselves have, inescapably, a genuinely metaphysical dimension, that is, a dimension which does not have solely to do with the content of thoughts about content.<sup>7</sup>

Turning now to Peirce:

Find a scientific man who proposes to get along without any metaphysics – not by any means every man who holds the ordinary reasonings of metaphysicians to scorn – and you have found one whose doctrines are thoroughly vitiated by the crude and uncriticised metaphysics with which they are packed. We must philosophise, said the great naturalist Aristotle – if only to avoid philosophising. Every man of us has a metaphysics, and has to have one; and it will influence his life greatly. Far better, then, that that metaphysics should be criticised and not be allowed to run loose ... In short, there is no escape from the need of a critical examination of “first principles”. (CP: 1.129)

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4 Oderberg (2007: 43).

5 See Ellis (2001) and Lowe (2006).

6 Lowe (1998: v).

7 Lowe (2002: 8–9).

Like Hegel, Peirce argues that not only is it impossible to avoid metaphysics in ordinary language, but also that to reject metaphysics is to do metaphysics. It is not just that ordinary language is packed with metaphysical concepts,<sup>8</sup> but even those conservative naturalist attitudes such as positivism and eliminativist varieties of nominalism also contain metaphysical commitments. So, for all of the positivists' and eliminativists' insistence that they have successfully purged enquiry of metaphysics "in the spirit of Newton's 'hypotheses non fingo'",<sup>9</sup> they are committed in some way to the very enterprise that they seek to reject. There is therefore something self-undermining about anti-metaphysics, which shows metaphysics to be indispensable – just as there is something self-undermining about denying the Principle of Non-Contradiction, insofar as to do so itself involves employing the principle.

This way of interpreting what can be dubbed 'The Indispensability Argument' as developed respectively by Hegel and Peirce is one which I principally attribute to Stern (2009). I am, of course, very sympathetic to Stern's way of understanding Hegel and Peirce on this subject. Even so, though, I would like to emphasise that I take the issue a step further than Stern,<sup>10</sup> because I now want to deal with an objection to the Indispensability Argument which Stern has not addressed in his work.<sup>11</sup> The objection concerns a lack of clarity in the Indispensability Argument as to which kind of metaphysics is indispensable.<sup>12</sup> To start, I would like to explain Stern's distinction between 'weak' metaphysics and 'strong' metaphysics:

- (a) 'Weak metaphysics is indispensable': we have to make very general claims about the world.
- (b) 'Strong metaphysics is indispensable': we have to make very general claims about every possible world, as opposed to only how things are in this world.

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8 See also CP: 1.229 and CP: 7.579.

9 Stern (2009: 4).

10 An additional difference between me and Stern, though it is not on grounds of disagreement, concerns how we respectively develop the connection between the necessity of metaphysical enquiry and the possibility of flourishing.

11 I wish to note here that the objection to the Indispensability Argument that I shall deal with was raised by Stern in conversation with me in Sheffield in September 2014.

12 I think this issue also affects Lowe's position on the unavoidability of metaphysics. For example, Lowe seems to switch between construing the indispensability of metaphysics on weak grounds (Lowe 2002: 6), and on strong grounds (Lowe 2002: 10–11).

The difference between weak and strong metaphysics concerns how sensitively we construe the idea of indispensability here. According to weak metaphysics, we only need to make very general claims about how this world is, at the most general ontological level. According to strong metaphysics, we have to make very general claims about how all possible worlds are, at the most general ontological level.

There is good reason to suppose Hegel is committed to strong metaphysics, because his famous use of the ‘All Determination is Negation’ principle is concerned with establishing the structure of being simpliciter, as opposed to only being as it is in this world.<sup>13</sup> For Hegel, the negation that accompanies determination is a necessary condition for the possibility of being in any genuine sense. In other words, Hegel claims that if anything is to be, then it must have determination and so negation. His argument can be understood as follows: for anything to be more than just a completely formal and abstract pure being, which for Hegel is the same as nothingness,<sup>14</sup> there must be some kind of determination. Such determination must involve some negation.<sup>15</sup> Further evidence for thinking that Hegel’s metaphysics is an instance of strong metaphysics can be found in the *Logic*, where Hegel argues for the necessary metaphysical structure of infinity:

[It is said that] the infinite, one the one side, exists by itself, and that the finite which has gone forth from it into a separate existence ... ; but it should rather be said that this separation is incomprehensible ... But equally it must be said that they are comprehensible, to grasp them even as they are in ordinary conception, to see that in the one there lies the determination of the other ... is to see the simple insight into their inseparability ... This unity of the finite and infinite and the distinction between them are just as inseparable as are finitude and infinity. (SL: 153–154)

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13 Cf. SL: 113, 536; and EL: § 87Z, § 91Z.

14 Cf. SL: 82.

15 See the following from Stephen Houlgate:

“For Parmenides ... [t]rue being is thus purely affirmative with no trace of negation or indeed change in it; it is thus ‘uncreated and imperishable’. This conception of being as purely affirmative continues to cast its shadow over subsequent philosophy right up to the modern period. It is to be seen, for example, in Spinoza’s assertion that ‘the definition of any thing affirms, and does not deny, the thing’s essence,’ ... [But] According to Hegel’s account, the category of being proves to harbour within itself the moment of negation in several forms: The concept of reality entails negation in the form of determinacy and difference; being something entails negation in the form of otherness and finitude; and infinite being also contains negation insofar as it lives in and through self-negating, finite beings”. (Houlgate 2006: 43–4)

See also Stern (2016).

From the above passage, we can construct the following argument:

- (1) If the finite is separate from the infinite, then there is something outside of the infinite.
- (2) There is nothing outside of the infinite.
- (3) Therefore, the finite is not separate from the infinite.

Hegel is concerned with dismissing the claims of pre-Kantian rationalists as metaphysical conjecture, since if the infinite were understood in opposition to the finite, then the infinite would be finite itself, because it would be limited by the finite. "There would then be per impossibile a greater reality than the infinite. Hence, the true infinite must therefore include the finite".<sup>16</sup> As with his argument concerning the necessary structure of being simpliciter, Hegel's metaphysical claim is directed at providing us with synthetic a priori knowledge of the necessary ontological conditions for things: being cannot be being simpliciter if it does not have negations; and the infinite cannot be the infinite simpliciter if it is separate from the finite. Both Hegelian arguments are instance of strong metaphysics, because they are concerned with establishing the structure of reality simpliciter, as opposed to only reality as it is in this world.

Thus far, I have argued that claiming Hegel's concerns in the opening chapters of the *Logic* are only concerns with explicating the necessary conditions for being in this world seems rather implausible as a reading of Hegel. But does this not raise a philosophical problem with the Indispensability Argument considered from the perspective of strong metaphysics? For, consider the following situation: there could be someone who is suspicious of the viability of metaphysics tout court but who would be prepared to accept that their own position involves some metaphysical commitments to universals and laws of nature, to adequately make sense of the world we experience. Their basis for doing so lies in recognising the deficiency of nominalist positions on universals and laws, in that these nominalist positions fail to adequately make sense of things here to the extent that nominalism runs afoul of the principles of the natural sciences. But, when asked if they think universals and laws are necessary for being in all possible worlds, they reply that it is not clear that universals and laws are necessary for being-qua-being even though they are necessary for being in this world – why think that just because universals and laws of nature are necessary for making sense of this world, that we are obliged to suppose universals and laws of nature are necessary for making sense of all worlds? Could there not be at least one possible world which does not require universality and nomological properties in order to be intelligible?

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<sup>16</sup> Beiser (2005: 142).



As I see it, the challenge to defending a strong metaphysical articulation of the Indispensability Argument, at least with regard to Hegel's metaphysics, turns on whether arguments for realism are ontologically extensive, in that their conclusions apply across all possible worlds rather than just this world, and whether the Kantian claim to do weak metaphysics while being agonistic about all possible worlds is incoherent. I contend that Hegel's arguments for realism about universals and laws of nature are ontologically extensive, and that he has some reason to legitimately think the Kantian position is incoherent. Given this, Hegel is able to deny the objection to the strong metaphysical articulation of the Indispensability Argument: Hegelians would worry about weak metaphysics on a metaphilosophical level, as under weak metaphysics, we are committed to universals and laws of nature not just because they do exist in this world, but also because they are consistent with the general commitments of natural science. While of course Hegel would happily wish for a convergence between the natural sciences and speculative philosophy,<sup>17</sup> I think he would object to the specific kind of convergence between the two offered by weak metaphysics: weak metaphysics appears to flirt with a conception of the interrelation between philosophy and science as one which sees philosophy having its cognitive value determined by how well it supports the general propositions of the natural sciences. Under weak metaphysics, robust ontological commitments to universals and nomological phenomena are needed, because they provide a speculative vindication of natural science's commitments to kinds and causal necessity.<sup>18</sup> Such a view is correct to say philosophy and natural science are in agreement that universals and laws exist and are necessary, but it goes wrong in conceiving of the philosopher (i. e. the metaphysician) as ultimately an elaborate natural scientist – for, according to this particular way of explicating the relationship between speculative metaphysics and natural science, both the speculative metaphysician and the natural scientist aim to explain why something in the world is thus-and-so, where the only real difference between the two answers lies in the different methodologies.<sup>19</sup>

However, the kind of enquiry the speculative philosopher makes is crucially different to the enquiry made by the natural scientist even though both the philosopher and the natural scientist share the same conclusion about the fundamental structure of this world as a whole. For, what the metaphysician is

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17 Cf. EL: 5.

18 Cf. EL: § 9, 33.

19 One should note here that the Peircean would probably be happy with characterising the metaphysician as an elaborate natural scientist.

principally interested in is the necessary structure of being-qua-being, and it is precisely because the interests of the metaphysician are more general than they are the kind of enquirer they are. This is why Hegelian metaphysics does not stop with the question 'Are universals necessary in this world?', but in fact goes on to ask whether or not there could be objects without properties in any possible world. Hegel's answer, of course, is that such a possibility cannot obtain, because the only possible type of being is being which is constituted by the categories of universality, particularity, and individuality. In other words, it is impossible for there to be indeterminate objects, according to Hegel's metaphysics. Such a claim is an instance of the most general attempt to make sense of things, and as such is ontologically extensive.

Moreover, I think there is reason to think that Hegel can claim the Kantian position advocating weak metaphysics but agnosticism about all possible worlds is incoherent: in his construal of the categories as necessary conditions for the possibility of objects in general,<sup>20</sup> Kant himself appears to make strong metaphysical claims about the forms of thought, even though he uses the forms of thought to argue for weak metaphysics.<sup>21</sup> Understood in this way, it seems that Hegel would sympathise with the argument Lowe gives here<sup>22</sup>:

Ironically enough, any such attempt would undermine the very position [the Kantian] is trying to defend: for in order to make any such attempt, the Kantian will have to engage in genuine metaphysical argument as traditionally conceived ...

But I do not think this is the only option for the Hegelian who wishes to claim the Kantian position is incoherent: for, "Kant's project seems to involve drawing a limit to what we can make sense of. But that in turn can seem an incoherent enterprise. More specifically, it can seem self-stultifying".<sup>23</sup> To see why, consider Moore's 'Limit Argument':

- (1) We cannot properly draw a limit to what we can make sense of unless we can make sense of the limit.
- (2) We cannot make sense of any limit unless we can make sense of what lies on both sides of it.
- (3) Therefore, we cannot properly draw a limit to what we can make sense of.

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<sup>20</sup> Cf. A139.

<sup>21</sup> See Walsh (1975: 253) for a similar claim.

<sup>22</sup> I acknowledge it is still questionable whether the 'genuine metaphysical argument as traditionally conceived' that Lowe mentions need amount to strong metaphysics.

<sup>23</sup> Moore (2012: 135).

Like Hegel,<sup>24</sup> Moore regards Kant's position on the unknowability of things-in-themselves to be incoherent, because Kant's alleged weak metaphysical argument involves some kind of commitment to strong metaphysical commitments. Given this, I think there is compelling reason to claim that the Indispensability Argument is meant to apply to strong metaphysics, at least according to the Hegelian perspective.

I would now like to turn to Peirce on this issue. Like Hegel before him, Peirce excoriates nominalism rather caustically,<sup>25</sup> and argues for realism about universals and laws of nature. According to Stern,

[i]n arguing for realism in this manner, Peirce will not allow the nominalist to claim that his position is somehow innocuous or less problematic because devoid of metaphysical commitments and implications; the question is which theory best fits with **the world as we find it to be**, and so can account for such phenomena as natural laws and the validity of our abductive generalisations concerning individuals of the same type.<sup>26</sup> (Emphasis added)

As I understand Stern here, what he has written could be construed as claiming that Peirce's arguments for realism are instances of weak metaphysics, because the philosophical question concerning Peirce about universals is one focused on the world we experience – both nominalism and realism are competing to best make sense of 'the world as we find it to be'. What is confusing, however, is Stern's textual justification for his reading of Peirce:

It is impossible to hold consistently that a quality only exists when it actually inheres in a body. If that were so, **nothing** but individual facts would be true. Laws would be fictions; and in fact, the nominalist does object to the word "law" and prefers "uniformity" to express his conviction that so far as the law expresses what might happen, but does not, it is nugatory. If, however, no law subsists other than expression of actual facts, the future is entirely indeterminate and so is general to the highest degree. Indeed, **nothing would exist** but the instantaneous state ... (CP: 1.422 – emphasis added)

This passage appears to indicate that Peirce's metaphysical ambitions are not the same as those of weak metaphysics. Peirce is concerned with the modal scope of general claims about the structure of being, where he is not so much interested in establishing the general structure of this world only, but rather interested in establishing the general structure of being-qua-being. In other words, this passage appears to show that Peirce's metaphysics is a species of

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24 Cf. EL: § 44, 87.

25 Cf. CP: 8.38 and CP: 7.485.

26 Stern (2009: 38–9).

strong metaphysics. One may find support for this reading of Peirce's metaphysics by considering the following from Paul Forster, who writes:

... Peirce thinks the science of inquiry affords a secure basis for metaphysical theorising. In taking this view he stands against nominalists (and others) who dismiss metaphysical questions as unanswerable or senseless. As he sees it, his theory of inquiry – including the pragmatic maxim, the theory of symbols, the principles of abduction, deduction and induction and the theory of truth – holds in any world in which there is a truth to discover ... The task of the metaphysician ... is to think through the implications of the theory of inquiry for our general concept of reality.<sup>27</sup>

Forster's interpretation of Peirce seems to suggest Peircean metaphysics is an example of strong metaphysics, given just how general is metaphysical enquiry for Peirce: it is about reality, rather than only about the reality of this world. As before with Hegelian metaphysics, the issue turns on whether Peircean metaphysical commitments are ontologically extensive, and that the Kantian claim to do weak metaphysics while being agonistic about all possible worlds is incoherent. I contend that Peircean metaphysical commitments are ontologically extensive when one considers the following passage, and that Peirce held the Kantian position advocating weak metaphysics but agnosticism about all possible worlds as being incoherent.<sup>28</sup> Given this, Peirce is able to reject the objection to the strong metaphysical articulation of the Indispensability Argument<sup>29</sup>:

Now Reality is an Affair of Thirdness as Thirdness, that is, in its mediation between Secondness and Firstness ... To be a nominalist consists in the undeveloped state in one's mind of the apprehension of Thirdness as Thirdness. The remedy for it consists in allowing ideas of human life to play a greater role in one's philosophy. Metaphysics is the science of Reality. Reality consists in regularity. Real regularity is active law. Active law is efficient reasonableness ... Reasonable reasonableness is Thirdness as Thirdness. (CP: 5.121)

What is interesting about this passage is how Peirce appears to regard his triadic categorial-ontological structure to be a necessary constitutive feature of being simpliciter.<sup>30</sup> However, in addition to indicating his commitment to a defence of

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<sup>27</sup> Forster (2011: 176).

<sup>28</sup> Cf. EP: 1.90.

<sup>29</sup> However, some Peirceans may object to interpreting Peirce as advocating strong metaphysics, because they may claim that according to Peirce's cosmology, the categories of Firstness, Secondness and Thirdness are a result of evolution, and that this would mean it is far from clear there could not be a world without those three categories.

<sup>30</sup> Cf. "Giving to being the broadest possible sense ... I should define Firstness, Secondness, and Thirdness thus:

Firstness is the mode of being of that which is such as it is, positively and without reference to anything else.

strong metaphysics on the basis of the Indispensability Argument, parts of this passage also seem to point in the direction of a different kind of critique of nominalism and a different kind of advocacy of metaphysical enquiry: Peirce appears to construe his critique of nominalism and his defence of realism in terms of therapeutic language: nominalism is characterised as a sort of philosophical pathogen which prevents us from realising our rational capacities. Such a line of arguing against nominalism and eliminativism in favour of a robust defence of metaphysics as indispensable for enquiry is noticeably different to the Indispensability Argument,<sup>31</sup> and is the issue I would now like to focus on. In what follows, I shall discuss a powerful and interesting strategy for defending metaphysics, one which Hegel and Peirce make on perfectionist grounds, namely that metaphysical speculation has an indispensable role to play in the achievement of human perfection. Using perfectionist approaches to ethics as a framework in which to contextualise the question of whether it could ever be desirable to eliminate metaphysics is under-explored and potentially a major avenue through which to explore the history of philosophy.

## II

In CP: 1.129, a passage we previously discussed, Peirce claimed '[e]very man of us has a metaphysics, and has to have one; and it will influence his life greatly'. The question now is how is metaphysics influencing our lives greatly. In other words, how is metaphysics directly valuable? To answer this, it would be particularly helpful to return to Hegel, who appears to offer an explanation of the significance of metaphysics in our lives:

It is true that Newton expressly warned physics to beware of metaphysics; but ... let it be said that he did not conduct himself in accordance with this warning at all. Only the animals are true blue physicists by this standard, since they do not think: whereas

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Secondness is the mode of being of that which is such as it is, with respect to a second but regardless of any third.

Thirdness is the mode of being of that which is such as it is, in bringing a second and third into relation to each other." (CP: 8.328 – emphasis added).

<sup>31</sup> By this, I do not mean to say Hegel and Peirce regarded the Indispensability Argument as deficient in some way. Rather, I merely mean that when one looks at Hegel and Peirce closely on the subject of the indispensability of metaphysical enquiry, they bring in perfectionist elements in defence of metaphysics. They do so, because they see an important connection between the kinds of theoretical positions one adopts and the kinds of practical commitments one has.

humans, in contrast, are thinking beings, and born metaphysicians. All that matters here is whether the metaphysics that is employed is of the right kind: and specifically whether ... we hold on to one-sided thought-determinations fixed by the understanding, so that they form the basis of our theoretical and of our practical action. (EL: §98Z, 156)

What we find here is Hegel's dismissal of the question concerning whether metaphysics tout court is possible, and his insistence on asking the 'real' metametaphysical question, 'What kind of metaphysics is the right kind of metaphysics?'. The new metametaphysical challenge posed by Hegel amounts to a litmus test for any metaphysical system to not merely be theoretically satisfying but also practically significant in a specific manner. By 'theoretically satisfying', I mean a theory which accurately describes/represents the fundamental structure of reality. The specific sense of practical significance I have in mind concerns a broadly perfectionist notion that our general understanding of how all things hang together, to use a Sellarsian turn of phrase,<sup>32</sup> enables us to achieve at homeness in the world, Hegel's term for 'flourishing'. In other words, the kind of metaphysics we are properly after is going to be sufficiently general/broad (hence not 'one-sided'), and one which is a metaphysics of reason/speculative reflection (hence not 'rigidly fixed by understanding'). The distinction, therefore, between reason and understanding is going to play a significant role in the development of the right kind of metaphysics. Unlike Kant, Hegel does not claim that "these terms ... designate completely independent functions or faculties. Reason is simply the necessary result of the immanent movement of the understanding".<sup>33</sup> In other words, the kind of approach of understanding will bequeath problems to reason that reason will have to resolve in a dialectical way, insofar as reason is a "form of holistic explanation, which shows how all finite things are parts of a wider whole".<sup>34</sup> For Hegel, the principal advantage of drawing this distinction between reason and understanding is that we can be in a position to not be wrapped up in the various problematic dualisms which are the inevitable consequence of reflecting only from the perspective of understanding, i. e. purely analytical methods of reflection, where these dualisms force us into contradictions and aporias. What reason provides consciousness with is the means to avoid the pitfalls of strict dualisms and the problems of analysis by thinking dialectically, i. e. by drawing distinctions yet establishing interconnectedness to a whole.<sup>35</sup> A metaphysics which does not draw this distinction or one which conflates reason with understanding will therefore

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32 Cf. Sellars (1963: 35).

33 Beiser (2005: 164).

34 *Ibid.*, p. 165.

35 Cf. LAI: 99–100.

not be the right kind of metaphysics. This is because failing to draw the distinction between reason and understanding or conflating reason with understanding results in a one-sided conception of thought and a purely mechanistic conception of philosophic explanation.

Given Hegel's concern with establishing a metaphysics which not only correctly grasps the structure of reality as a whole but also enables us to exercise our rational capacities in a speculative manner so as to flourish, we can now see why exactly Hegel and Peirce were so fond of Aristotelianism. Starting with Hegel first on this issue:

Ancient metaphysics had in this respect a higher conception of thinking than is current today. For it based itself on the fact that the knowledge of things obtained through thinking is alone what is really true in them, that is, things not in their immediacy but as first raised into the form of thought, as things thought. Thus this metaphysics believed that thinking (and its determinations) is not anything alien to the object, but rather is its essential nature ... But reflective understanding took possession of philosophy ... Directed against reason, it behaves as ordinary common sense and imposes its view that truth rests on sensuous reality, that thoughts are only thoughts, meaning that it is sense perception which first gives them filling and reality and that reason left to its own resources engenders only figments of the brain. In this self-renunciation on the part of reason, the Notion of truth is lost; it is limited to knowing only subjective truth, phenomena, appearances, only something to which the nature of the object itself does not correspond: knowing has lapsed into opinion. (SL: 45–6)

What Hegel means by claiming that ancient metaphysics had a “higher conception of thinking” is unclear, and easily misinterpreted: rather than reading his affection for ancient metaphysics to amount to a straightforward desire to resurrect every single aspect of pre-Kantian metaphysics, we should read Hegel as making the following claim: ancient metaphysics, pace some kind of empiricist positivism/scientism, understood the world as comprising ideal entities, entities which provide unity and rational order to the content of our experience. These entities, crucially, are not objects that can be immediately perceived or empirically verified in the same way as one can immediately perceive or empirically verify that a table or a chair exists. Rather, ‘ideal’ kinds, such as universals, are part and parcel components of reality that require us to identify certain properties of the world that are more basic than immediately observable sensible properties. However, this does not mean that Hegel thinks that metaphysics simpliciter requires some spooky cognitive faculty, such as intellectual intuition – it just means that a discursive consciousness, which takes concepts to be the principal (and in fact, only) means of cognising objects, must go beyond an epistemic framework which has a narrow/thin conception of thought. An important consequence of this view is that if any philosopher is

inclined to think that metaphysics simpliciter is intellectually bankrupt, then the philosophical commitments of their view condemns their cognitive practices and intellectual endeavours to an impoverished state.

One helpful way of understanding how Hegel thinks anti-metaphysical positions such as nominalism result in intellectual impoverishment is by considering his views on concrete universality in the *Science of Logic*, where Hegel's discussion of the Concept is the forum for his distinction between the abstract and the concrete universal. In Book III, Hegel writes the following:

The universal is thus the totality of the Notion; it is concrete, and far from being empty, it has through its Notion a content, and a content in which it not only maintains itself but one which is its own and immanent in it. We can, indeed, abstract from the content: but in that case we do not obtain a universal of the Notion but only the abstract universal, which is an isolated, imperfect moment of the Notion and has no truth. (SL: 603–4)

The concrete universal is understood to involve a dialectical relationship between universality, individuality and particularity. Crucially, this is what distinguishes the concrete universal from the abstract universal; the abstract universal is not dialectically structured, hence why Hegel regards it as “isolated” and “imperfect”. Its isolation and imperfection consist in how the abstract universal is the result of a poor way of relating the categories of universality, particularity, and individuality. Abstract universality is opposed to the particular and the individual. Concrete universality is not opposed to the particular and the individual. Furthermore, the concrete universal is the communion of universality, particularity and individuality. And, as such, is the proper conceptualisation of the relationship between these three categories. The significance of this can be found by discussing Hegel's analyses of certain judgements, which can shed light on what exactly a concrete universal is for Hegel.

(A) ‘This rose is red’<sup>36</sup>: The property ‘red’ is here understood as something that belongs to the rose. The rose, of course, is not only red. For, the rose has a scent, form, texture, all of which are not contained in the property of being red. The rose being red does not entail that the only property of the rose is its being red, nor does it entail that the rose must have a particular scent, form, and texture based on its being red. Furthermore, ‘is red’ is not exclusively a property that one rose or all roses have. The universal is only accidentally related to the object. Therefore, with these kinds of universals, “there is a clear distinction we can draw between the universal and the individual that possess that property, and that universal and the other

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36 Cf. EL: § 172, 250.



properties it possesses, so there is no dialectical unity here between these elements”.<sup>37</sup>

- (B) ‘All men are mortal’: Judgements of this form, according to Hegel, are a species of ‘judgements of reflection’, namely quantitative judgements. The property ‘being a man’ is an essential property of all individual members of the set of human beings. ‘Being a man’ is not an accidental property of all individual members of the set of human beings. ‘Having hands’, for example, is a property which all human beings may possess, but that quality is not an essential property. ‘Being mortal’ is an essential property of all human beings – though, of course, not every mortal being is human. For Hegel, those quantitative judgements which are also necessary judgements – such as ‘All men are mortal’ – constitute the last form of the judgement of reflection, and as such, transition to the next major judgement form, the ‘judgement of necessity’. In this instance now, the universal judgement ‘All men are mortal’ becomes equivalent to the judgement ‘Man as such is mortal’. This kind of judgement is conceived of as a ‘categorical judgement’, the first type of judgement of necessity.<sup>38</sup>
- (C) ‘Caius is a man’: ‘Being human’ is an essential property of Caius. “The single human is what he is in particular, only insofar as he is, first of all, human as such, and within the universal; and this universal is not just something over and above the other abstract qualities or mere determinations of reflection, but is rather what permeates and includes within itself everything particular”. (EL: § 175, 253) Caius can only be a particular individual man if he is a man. And Caius cannot be an indeterminate man, he must be a determinate instantiation of man, “whose differences from other men nonetheless do not prevent him exemplifying the same universal ‘man’”.<sup>39</sup>

All three judgements are used by Hegel to express a specific stage of the relationship between the categories of universality, particularity, and individuality. However, (C) is the kind of judgement that arrives at the dialectical relationship between these three categories. The universal is now concrete, principally because it is what an individual is, in that an individual is an instantiation of that kind of universal: Caius is an instantiation of man. By exemplifying the property of being a man, even though Caius is distinct from other individual exemplifications of man, Caius is the individual that he is, while his being a man

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37 Stern (2007: 128).

38 Cf. SL: 649–50.

39 Stern (2007: 129).

is also required for and compatible with the particular determinations that make him the specific man he is.

This account of Hegel's position shows that he can claim that it is impossible to find a satisfactory paraphrase of propositions involving property-ascriptions in which reference to universals is eliminated: for, the nominalist idea that one can establish the truth-conditions of the proposition 'x is f' by claiming that 'is f' applies to x<sup>40</sup> seems rather implausible. Indeed, it could even be suggested that the notion of 'applying a term/predicate to a subject' involves a commitment to some kind of universal, namely a relation – and if that is the case, then it seems nominalism may well collapse into realism. As David Armstrong writes: "The Realist may well argue, correctly I believe, that a convincing account of the semantics of 'applies' cannot be given without appeal to the properties and/or relations of the object [x]".<sup>41</sup> In other words, arguments in favour of predicate nominalism, whilst they have no commitments to monadic universals, the idea of 'applying a predicate to a subject' appears to have a commitment to a polyadic universal, namely some kind of relation. In resisting a non-nominalist semantic theory, nominalists appear to follow the conduct of an ostrich thrusting its head into the sand, whereby their philosophical commitments condemn their cognitive practices and intellectual endeavours to an impoverished state: not only does nominalism appear to misrepresent the world, its failure to appreciate the philosophical problem also seems to have harmful consequences for our intellectual hopes and our aim of realising our rational capacities.

Such a critique of dismissive attitudes to metaphysics is made in another passage from the *Science of Logic*:

The fact is that there no longer exists any interest either in the form or the content of metaphysics or in both together. If it is remarkable when a nation has become indifferent to its constitutional theory, to its national sentiments, its ethical customs and virtues, it is certainly no less remarkable when a nation loses its metaphysics, when the spirit which contemplates its own pure essence is no longer a present reality in the life of the nation. The esoteric teaching of the Kantian philosophy – that the understanding ought not to go beyond experience, else the cognitive faculty will become a theoretical reason which by itself generates nothing but fancies of the brain – this was a justification from a philosophical quarter for the renunciation of speculative thought. In support of this popular teaching came the cry of modern educationists that the needs of the time demanded attention to immediate requirements, that just as experience was the primary factor for knowledge, so for skill in public and private life, practice and practical training generally were essential and alone necessary, theoretical insight being harmful even. Philosophy

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40 Cf. Devitt (1997: 96).

41 Armstrong (1997: 108).

and ordinary common sense thus co-operating to bring about the downfall of metaphysics, there was seen the strange spectacle of a cultured nation without a metaphysics – like a temple richly ornamented in other respects but without a holy of holies.<sup>42</sup> (SL: 25–6)

Here, Hegel appears to blame Kant's doctrine of Humility for (inadvertently) giving rise to the growing positivist and nominalist philosophic culture in early nineteenth century German states. The ultimate worry that Hegel has concerning Kant's doctrine of Humility, expressed by Hegel's opposition to the limitation on human knowledge, is that the subjectivism and relativism of formal idealism prevents us from developing our rational faculties, faculties which Hegel is seriously committed to as the key to being in touch with the rationality embedded in the structure of reality itself. Why Hegel is so concerned about developing a system which is unrestrictive and focused entirely on the development of rationality is not because he believes human knowledge can be extended to transcendent things-in-themselves, but because he thinks that the basic idea of restriction, the idea of setting limits, serves as a check on human intellectual endeavour and creativity, things which he regards as essential for human flourishing. Let us call this argument 'The Perfectionist Argument'. In this respect, not only is metaphysics possible but it is also indispensable to human flourishing. We can see why Hegel has perfectionist attitudes towards metaphysical enquiry when we recall the following from a passage we previously discussed:

Only the animals are true blue physicists ..., since they do not think: whereas humans, in contrast, are thinking beings, and born metaphysicians.

For Hegel, arguably the most important feature of human nature is our nature as a thinking being – or, to be more specific, a thinking being with a capacity for discursivity and self-consciousness. Our capacity for discursive thought is important, not only in the sense of establishing a taxonomical difference between rational animals and non-rational animals, but also in the sense of establishing what is normatively significant/naturally good for us, given our nature as discursive thinkers. To quote Philippa Foot and Terry Irwin on this issue:

'[N]atural goodness', as I define it, which is attributable only to living things themselves and to their parts, characteristics, and operations, is intrinsic or 'autonomous' goodness in that it depends directly on the relation of an individual to the 'life form' of its species.<sup>43</sup>

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42 See CP: 5.61; and W2: 485–6.

43 Foot (2001: 26–27).

(1) Human nature consists in rational agency, that is, in exercising the capacity to guide behaviour by practical reason. (2) The human good consists in the full actualisation of this capacity in fulfilling our other capacities. (3) The virtues are the different ways of actualising this capacity.<sup>44</sup>

According to this model then, anything which prevents us from realising our nature by not allowing us to develop our capacities for discursive and reflective thought must not be pursued as an effort to achieve self-realisation. This forms the normative explanation for why Hegel is so resistant to eliminativist attitudes to metaphysics, because with regard to eliminativism, we are prevented from developing our rational faculties.

However, for all of Hegel's impassioned critique of orthodox Kantianism and varieties of eliminativism about metaphysics, neither the orthodox Kantian nor an eliminativist about metaphysics think of themselves as placing limits on thought that tend to limit our ability to flourish as rational beings. For the orthodox Kantian, moving from the science of being-qua-being to transcendental idealism is a crucial step along the path to human flourishing, because transcendental idealism aims to properly direct our rational faculties and thereby provide the conditions whereby enquirers can achieve rational satisfaction and self-realisation. Rather than place undue limits on thought, one is merely calling attention to and respecting our discursive capacities and the ways in which they are restricted by the conditions of sensibility and our cognitive constitution. Equally, for the eliminativist about metaphysics, the elimination of metaphysical speculation is deemed as a requirement for the achievement of human perfection. So, what we are left with now appears to be a philosophic stalemate, with the additional worry that both the Hegelian and the orthodox Kantian/eliminativist beg the question against one another: for Hegel, there is need to make recourse to speculative metaphysics, in order to flourish, because Kantianism and eliminativism are obstacles to human self-realisation. For the orthodox Kantian/eliminativist, there is no need at all to recourse to such commitments, in order to flourish, because Hegelianism is the obstacle to human self-realisation.

One way in which this stalemate could perhaps be broken, in Hegel's favour, is by looking at Peirce's Rule of Reason: "Do not block the way of inquiry" (EP: 2.48). For Peirce, the reason why nominalism and its philosophical correlates, namely eliminativism, pose such a threat, to use Forster's term, is that nominalism and its philosophical correlates, due to their criteria of explanation, restrict "the kinds of questions that can be investigated and limit the

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44 Irwin (2009: 882).

kinds of answers to questions that can be offered and in doing so inhibit the progress of inquiry”.<sup>45</sup> And the problem with restricting enquiry is that such a move is “anti-scientific in essence” (CP: 2.166). And the fundamental worry about nominalism and its philosophical correlates being essentially anti-scientific is not simply that they conflict with the metaphysical commitments embedded in the theories of natural science, but that they also go against the very idea of critical enquiry simpliciter. As Peirce writes, “[i]t is one of the peculiarities of nominalism that it is continually supposing things to be absolutely inexplicable” (CP: 1.170). For Hegel and Peirce, what constitutes something being scientific is not simply that what one proposes has been put forward by doing natural science. Rather, what makes something scientific is establishing conclusions about the structure of reality and the like on the basis of self-critical and broad enquiry, where such practices are not just beneficial for our theoretical-intellectual concerns but also for our development as human beings. As Christopher Hookway writes, “Peirce’s work in ethics is motivated by a desire to explain the possibility of adopting the life of science as he understands it”.<sup>46</sup> This is elaborated by Forster, who claims that “[o]n [Peirce’s] view, human beings are not cogs in a vast cosmic mechanism, but rather are free, creative agents capable of transforming the world through the active realisation of intelligent ideals”.<sup>47</sup>

What is at stake when one puts forward philosophical theories or even when one does philosophy is not merely whether or not one attains sufficiently good levels of representational accuracy. Peirce is not particularly interested in this purely theoretical mode of cognitive activity. Rather, what matters for Peirce is “an ultimate, impartial, binding and rational framework for the organisation and fulfilment of human potential”.<sup>48</sup> The explanation for why Peirce was so explicitly opposed to nominalism and its philosophical correlates is that they are obstacles to the organisation and fulfilment of human potential: nominalism seeks to restrict enquiry, due to being dogmatic and prejudicial in some ways, and by doing so, nominalism fails to promote genuinely critical thought, thereby preventing us from actualising our rational capacities. And because our rational capacities fail to be fully realised by nominalism, the possibility of us flourishing does not obtain.

In response, the Kantian may well concede that we would in fact be more realised as rational beings under the rubric of Hegelian and Peircean

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45 Forster (2011: 7).

46 Hookway (2013: 192).

47 Forster (2011: 245).

48 *Ibid.*, p. 246.

metaphysics. That being said, though, there is still no guarantee whatsoever that Hegelian and/or Peircean metaphysics are successful: centuries of failure in metaphysics would suggest that success in first philosophy is far from assured. Given this meta-inductive scepticism, it would appear we should regretfully face up to the fact that metaphysics is something we should abandon even though to do better on this score would enable us to become more realised as rational beings. So, rather than block enquiry for the sake of it due to dogmatic attitudes to metaphysics, our sensitivity to the history of metaphysics would suggest that continuing down this particular path of enquiry is really not going to lead us anywhere at all.

Neither Hegel nor Peirce would claim that the task facing them is not difficult. However, I think both philosophers would have two objections to the Kantian here. Firstly, since Hegel and Peirce are fallibilists,<sup>49</sup> the talk of ‘guarantees’ would not resonate with them at all, given how the notion of a guarantee appears to be infallibilist; secondly, even though there has been plenty of failure in metaphysics throughout the centuries, why should we take such failure to automatically guarantee any future metaphysics is doomed to failure as well? That metaphysics seems to keep returning and is experiencing a powerful resurgence in contemporary analytic philosophy may in fact signal just how important and exciting the discipline is as a profound source of value for human beings: the respective metaphysical positions of Hegel and Peirce as well as the contemporary work of Lowe and Moore are all excellent instantiations of why metaphysics is important for human development, because they each seem to reveal what is crucial to critical enquiry – namely “radically new concepts by which to live”.<sup>50</sup> Philosophy is much like the phenomenological subject in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*: it is fallible and multi-dimensional and moves through various novel stages and positions in an attempt to achieve rational satisfaction; and metaphysics occupies a central role in the attempt to achieve rational satisfaction and a fortiori human self-realisation, because metaphysical concepts such as freedom and agency are paradigmatically thick ethical concepts. As such, the Hegelian-Peircean effort to make sense of things is not just an exercise in representing states of affairs, it is also an exercise in finding ways for human beings to realise themselves through the practice of understanding the nature of reality and our place in it.

However, even if one agrees that the Hegelian-Peircean conception of metaphysics provides the right account of human flourishing and self-realisation, would it be a requirement for us to flourish to believe that account? I think the

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49 Cf. EP: 2.49.

50 Moore (2012: 20).

answer to that question, for both Hegel and Peirce, would be an unequivocal 'yes': central to both Hegelian and Peircean varieties of metaphysics is the connection between the right kind of reasoning and appropriate habits for action. According to both Hegel and Peirce, thought is not a "theoretical detachment".<sup>51</sup> To be a thinking subject is not to be a disembodied *res cogitans* that is separate from the world and is little more than a cognitive voyeur. Rather, to be a thinking subject is to be an embodied being embedded in the world. Given our nature as rational and practical embodied thinkers embedded in the world, how we understand our rational activity is going to principally depend on what kinds of habits we develop for engaging with the world and other rational agents. For both Hegel and Peirce, at least as far as I understand them, the kinds of habits we ought to develop for best engaging with the world and with one another are habits which aim to "expand the frontiers of inquiry",<sup>52</sup> by advocating a wholly inclusive framework for realising our rational and social potential: what is essential for human flourishing and self-realisation is cultivating practices which best enable enquirers to fully actualise their capacity for critical thought, enabling ideas to undergo "further assessment, challenge, defence, and correction".<sup>53</sup> The practices which are most conducive to actualising critical thought are those practices which aim to make sense of things in the most unprejudiced way, and a necessary feature of having unprejudiced attitudes to making sense of things is "a distinctive kind of self-consciousness",<sup>54</sup> namely being aware of the right way of going about understanding reality and how to flourish.

We would appear, by not blocking the way of enquiry, to have avoided adopting one-sided forms of thought, rigidly fixed by the understanding. In doing so, Hegel's and Peirce's respective positions form the basis of our theoretical as well as our practical work: they show that not only is metaphysics unavoidable in ordinary language and natural scientific enquiry but that metaphysics is, to use an expression from Bernard Williams, "a humanistic discipline",<sup>55</sup> and therefore also required for our development as human beings. Such is the powerful nature of this metametaphysical position that we have found a particularly compelling and rich positive connection between two philosophical traditions that have traditionally been conceived of as intellectual antitheses. Moreover, there seems to be very strong reason to

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51 Ratcliffe (2011: 126).

52 Rorty (2000: 60).

53 Brandom (1994: 647).

54 Moore (2012: 342).

55 See Williams (2006a, 2006b).

suppose that Hegel and Peirce should be included in contemporary mainstream analytic metaphysical discussions concerning eliminativism and other related positions.

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