
Puntel, Lorenz. Structure and Being: A Theoretical Framework for a Systematic Philosophy.(Book review)

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PUNTEL, Lorenz. *Structure and Being: A Theoretical Framework for a Systematic Philosophy*. Trans. White, Alan. University Park: Pennsylvania State University, 2008. xxvi + 518pp. Cloth, \$75.00-Lorenz Puntel's monumental *Struktur und Sein* (2006) has found in Alan White not only a translator, but a collaborator. This contrasts with the fate of Alain Badiou's *L'Être et l'Événement*, which appeared in English seventeen years after its initial publication. I draw the parallel for a reason: just as Badiou placed set theory and analytic philosophy in the service of continental philosophy, Puntel draws from similar sources to construct a comprehensive framework for a renewed metaphysics. Even so, this is a book not for analytic philosophers, but for those interested in the Aristotelian tradition, particularly in its Thomist and Hegelian guises. Having seemingly abandoned metaphysics, Puntel reconstitutes it out of purely analytic sources.

His book can be situated by contrasting it with Badiou, who radicalized the Platonic tradition by permitting its poetic and mystical side to trump its rationalism. In "rescuing" ontology, Badiou's intent was to create a foil for the Event, the rupture of a unity that can never exist as such. In contrast, Puntel ignores Plato while embracing Aristotle's sense that the world as such is understandable. If he nonetheless "abandons" Aristotle, it is because he rejects the idea of substance, recognizing its source in a grammatical subject knowable only through its predications. Substance-metaphysics sets itself up for the Kantian critique.

In his attempt to escape this dilemma, Puntel finds unlikely allies: Carnap, Wittgenstein, and Quine. From Carnap he takes the idea of a theoretical framework, extending it into the ideal of an ultimate framework that, while absolute, is completely open-ended, suitable to a world understood as "the unrestricted universe of discourse."

Restricted viewpoints find their place within such an ideal framework. Recognizing that factual observations such as "the sun rises every day" and "the earth rotates daily on its axis" can be reconciled once they are properly situated, Puntel proposes a philosophical research program that systematically compares and orders theoretical frameworks with the goal of articulating (in the language of formal logic) the most comprehensive framework yet achievable. Chapter three offers just such a framework.

Wittgenstein's contribution is the view of the *Tractatus*: "The world is the totality of facts, not of things." Puntel finds here an alternative to the materialist ontology that analytic philosophers take for granted when translating everyday speech into first-order predicate logic, using an existential quantifier that carries

For just this reason, the book IS for analytic philosophers -- or, better, simply for philosophical theoreticians.

In addition, Aristotle has no theory of being (*Sein, esse*).

The framework is comprehensive because its subject matter is comprehensive; it is not ultimate, not absolute, and not "completely open-ended."

Frameworks are compared within metaframeworks; the book treats this complex metasystematic issue in extensive detail.

illegitimate ontological baggage: there is no "x" apart from the facts themselves. Facts are real and facts are precisely what can be stated: the Kantian gap is closed. The title Structure and Being refers to a tension that mediates itself linguistically: nature is implicitly rational consciousness and rational consciousness is implicitly the theoretical understanding of everything. The world "speaks" in a vast array of facts that, all being facts about the world, cohere sufficiently that philosophy can say that the world speaks intelligibly.

For the sake of intelligibility, language can dispense with both the grammatical subject and the knowing subject. Puntel cites Quine's translation of "a white cat is facing a dog and bristling" with "it's catting whitely, bristlingly, and dogwardly." Instead of implying that cat and dog somehow exist "in themselves" the restated sentence allows us to stick to the facts. In addition, Quine included a metaphysically promising "it is" that, attachable to any "facing" whatsoever, has the potential of Heidegger's famous "es gibt." If Puntel rejects Heidegger's mysticism, he affirms his bold attempt to think Being.

This will please the metaphysically inclined. (Given that Puntel restores the trinity of the true, the good, and the beautiful, it is legitimate to speak in this context of pleasure.) Structure and Being is an analytic permutation of Parmenides' [TEXT NOT REPRODUCIBLE IN ASCII] [for thinking and being are the same]. After translating being into the hyper-rationalism of analytic philosophy, Puntel jettisons the unarticulated materialism that renders that tradition incoherent. He provides a contemporary version of Aristotle's assurance (which he frequently cites) that "the soul is in a certain way all beings" (De Anima, F 431b21). What he does not cite, but which animates the whole work is the view from above: [TEXT NOT REPRODUCIBLE IN ASCII].

Had this in turn been animated by Badiou's "null set," the irresolvable mystery of Being's strange eruption from the void, Puntel might have given us the completed metaphysics for our age: Aristotle without the closures of substance; intelligibility in a post-Copernican (open-ended) universe. As it is, I fear that he has made something of an idol of his rationalism. Puntel's standpoint of pure theoreticity suits a scientific age. It is less likely to suit those who search for consolation in a world mired in evil. That the world is in principle intelligible does not make it intelligible in fact. But if Puntel's thinking is somehow too cerebral, it embodies a purity that is commendable. For that very reason, his book deserves to be read and discussed widely.--Joseph P. Lawrence, College of the Holy Cross.

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Being as such and as a whole is intrinsically linguistic, and human beings, as minded, are intrinsically coextensive with Being as such and as a whole.

The SSP's facts are identical to propositions most clearly and accurately expressed by sentences having the form "It's F-ing."

Chapter 2 of BEING AND GOD reveals Heidegger's "thinking" of Being to be utterly inadequate philosophically.

νόησις νοήσεως

Both STRUCTURE AND BEING and BEING AND GOD reject as unintelligible such formulations as "the irresolvable mystery of Being's strange eruption from the void."

The book involves no idolatry. The problem of evil is within the scope of the SSP, but is not addressed in either STRUCTURE AND BEING or BEING AND GOD. The task for one addressing it would be to articulate the solution to it that provides maximal intelligibility and coherence within the SSP. That solution might or might not provide anyone any consolation, but its not providing anyone consolation would be of no relevance to its adequacy within the theory. How persons who are religious -- and who, perhaps, find consolation in religion -- can also be strictly theoretical philosophers is explained in BEING AND GOD, Section 3.7.4.2.2.